



DEATH, BELIEF AND POLITICS IN CENTRAL AFRICAN HISTORY

Walima T. Kalusa and Megan Vaughan

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(Zambia) in the 1960s', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 37, 1 (2011), 63–77.

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INTRODUCTION

Death – Again?

Walima T. Kalusa and Megan Vaughan

In 2008, one of the authors of this study gave some account of the research that forms part of this book to a Malawian colleague. She looked at the author critically, sighed, and then said, ‘What are you people going to do when we stop dying?’ She was not referring to the ultimate conquest of death promised by Christianity (though such an interpretation would not have been out of place in this deeply Christian country). Rather she was commenting on the research industry that has grown up around HIV/AIDS in Malawi and the fact that, with the greater availability of anti-retroviral drugs, death might not be so readily and easily available as a research topic to outsiders. Though the author did not think of herself as part of the HIV/AIDS research ‘industry’, it was a salutary moment.

The series of essays that forms this book is part of a larger project on the history of death in central, eastern and southern Africa since 1800. The project began in 2004 and over the period in which we carried out the research and wrote it up what is so often referred to as the ‘landscape’ of death certainly shifted around us. Death did not go away, as our Malawian colleague had optimistically predicted, but as the availability of anti-retroviral drugs increased, what had sometimes felt like a collective death sentence had been commuted, not so much to a life ‘sentence’ but to a life of ‘adherence’ to a drug regime. It appeared not unrelated that ‘northern’-dominated

scholarship on Africa, much of which had been preoccupied with death (perhaps with good reason) in the 1990s and early 2000s, was beginning to rediscover life. Miyazaki's account of the anthropology of knowledge in Fiji, *The Method of Hope* (2004), became much cited by Africanists. As Patience Mususa's work on Zambia reminds us, the ability to carry on with life in the face of hardship and death is highly valued in poor communities, and persisted through the worst times.¹ But life-saving drugs also help. Though mortality rates from HIV/AIDS and other diseases remain appallingly high in this part of Africa, there is a sense that some kind of corner has been turned, at least for as long as the drugs continue to be available.

We had made a decision at the outset of our project not to study the HIV/AIDS epidemic directly, critically important though this was in informing contemporary ideas about death and death practices. In part we made this decision precisely because so much social research was now being directed at this subject that it threatened to over-determine all accounts of social reality. Malawi, for example, sometimes appeared to be overwhelmed by large research teams working on all aspects of HIV/AIDS. Rural Malawians were not unused to being visited by researchers asking them questions relating to poverty and food security – issues for which, unfortunately, the country has for decades provided plenty of research 'fodder'. Malawians referred to this research as 'what did you eat for breakfast?', but now the detailed questions on diets and household budgets had given way to a wholly new set of more intimate enquiries on sexual behaviour and sexual practices. Adding our own enquiries to these did not seem like a particularly productive way forward, particularly as vast amounts of 'data' were already being generated.

In this context our interest in death as historians has two broad dimensions. Firstly, and particularly in light of the very broad generalizations that the HIV/AIDS literature sometimes

made on the subject of African beliefs and practices around death, we wanted, quite simply, to historicize these and also to point to their diversity. Secondly, we aimed to place the history of death in this part of Africa within the wider, and ever-growing, comparative history of death in Europe, the Americas and Asia, and to address some of the broad themes discussed in that comparative literature, particularly around 'modernization' and the 'secularization' of death. Some of our findings on these broader issues are summarized in the Introductions to two journal special issues arising from the larger project.² A number of these questions are discussed in the present volume, which focuses specifically on Malawi and on the Copperbelt and northern parts of Zambia.

It is important to emphasize that though it is possible to make broad generalizations about death practices in this region, there is also an immense amount of diversity within those practices, and there is no uniform trajectory of change within them. If this is true of the limited geographical scope of the present volume, it is even more striking in relation to the wider Central and Southern African region. In particular, the extent to which, before the advent of colonial rule, death was associated with space and place, and territorial sovereignty, varied enormously. Some societies buried their dead on the margins of settlements and avoided these places. Some communities either destroyed the dwellings of the dead or allowed them to disintegrate; others cherished the knowledge that their family members were buried, quite literally, under their feet, beneath the entrance to the house or the family cattle kraal. In present day South Africa especially, burial sites become bound up inextricably with land claims and arguments for restitution.³ In this context the spaces of death acquire new meanings.

Chapters I and II contain a discussion of the very specific and unusual case of the mortuary rituals of Bemba chiefs in

colonial northern Zambia. This set of elaborate and dramatic practices attracted significant scholarly and colonial administrative attention and has left a rich documentary record as a result. The funeral rites of the chiefs of the Crocodile Clan (*abena ng'andu*), and particularly those of the Paramount Chief Chitimukulu, appear to be a clear expression of what David Gordon has called 'spiritual sovereignty', a reminder to Chitimukulu's far-flung subjects that the spiritual dimension of political power, like death itself, was pervasive and inescapable.⁴ Like many funeral rites the world over, Bemba chiefly mortuary practice moved its participants from death to life, but not immediately. While the body of the chief was in the process of 'drying out', agricultural and sexual activities were suspended. Life could move on, and fertility was restored, only when this dangerous liminal period had been collectively negotiated. Adults were reminded that responsibility for the successful negotiation of death was dependent on their collective adherence to a set of rules governing everyday practice, but particularly those governing marital sexual practice. Sexuality and death were inextricably linked, and were in turn tied to the authority of this hierarchical political system. At least, that was the theory. Of course, it would be entirely wrong to assume that Bemba subjects were all completely in thrall to this set of ideas and practices, and there is compelling scholarship from this region reminding us that the Bemba chiefly and spiritual system was far from hegemonic. Nevertheless, Bemba ideology probably was successful in latching on to a powerful set of pre-existing ideas around death and sexuality, which appear to have had a long and pervasive existence.

One of the most important themes in the history of death in this region from the late nineteenth century is that of the impact of Christianity and, for parts of Malawi, of Islam. Chapter I explores one small part of this larger history through

a discussion of the White Fathers' missionary activities in the Bemba heartland and its surroundings in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The White Fathers arrived in this region during a period when violent death was commonplace. Bemba chiefs were in danger of undermining their own authority through the excessive use of terror and violence, stretching the credibility of their spiritual system and their claim to be the generators of life and fertility. The avowed strategy of the White Fathers' order was to proceed through the initial conversion of the dominant political authorities – in this case the Bemba chiefs of the Crocodile Clan. This was certainly the approach adopted by the charismatic Bishop Dupont, who appears to have been more impressed than he was appalled by the excesses of Bemba domination and who was not above politicking with death in order to gain influence. But this was only part of the story. The Catholic missionaries also took immensely seriously their duty to baptise the sick and dying – and there were plenty of them amongst Bemba subjects and victims of Bemba aggression. Eventually, and inevitably, their work amongst commoners brought them up against the spiritual as well as the political power of the chiefs. Though the offer of death-bed baptism met with mixed results, their practice of taking in and nursing those of the dead and dying who had been banished from villages made a deep impression. Death is a shared human experience, and their focused attention on death brought them close to the emotional dimensions of the dominant spiritual system.

But as they moved from death-bed and infant baptisms to adult conversion, so the missionaries increasingly had to grapple with some very real differences between local understandings of death and Christian ones. Though Christianity held out the promise of the ultimate conquest of death, Christian missionaries in this region, both Catholic and

Protestant, often felt that the local dead were not dead enough and so they were placed in the somewhat paradoxical position of stressing the finality of death. Missionaries struggled to persuade their converts and potential converts to consign their dead loved ones and ancestors entirely to an 'afterlife'. They viewed the pervasive presence of the spirits of the dead in the everyday lives of the living as an obstacle to full Christian conversion. Even those areas in which local and Christian beliefs appeared to resonate with each other could pose serious dilemmas. For the Catholics in particular, the sacrificial logic and symbolism of the Eucharist created a particular problem, the temporary solution to which was to severely ration access to this central sacrament.

The close associations between sexuality and death in local spiritual thinking were also deeply disturbing to many missionaries, Protestant and Catholic. Reforming sexual and marital practice was of course in itself a major ambition of Christian missionaries in Africa, but it was made more of a challenge when sex and death were so deeply intertwined (an issue explored in Chapter II, and which recurs in later chapters). In Bemba-speaking areas of Zambia, for example, missionaries condemned the practice of 'removing' the polluting power of death from a surviving spouse through a ritualized sexual act. In the Nyakyusa-speaking region of south-west Tanzania Christian converts were prohibited from attending 'pagan' burials where the power of sexuality was openly displayed. Local belief systems did not claim to 'conquer' death but rather to manage it, as Godfrey Wilson graphically described in his analysis of the emotional content of death beliefs and ritual in Nyakyusa communities. Channelling the force of sexuality was intrinsic to the management of death; mismanaging sexual practice or neglecting taboos was tantamount to bringing death upon oneself or one's family. As Christianity spread, and as it became possible to imagine a community of Christian

‘ancestors’, so the process of conversion became less fraught with danger. But the context of colonial rule in this region was a testing one for all belief systems. In some areas the devastation of the nineteenth century slave trade and its attendant conflicts were followed by outbreaks of epidemic disease, by famine and infertility, and then by the horrors of a European war fought on African soil. Far from being conquered, death appeared to be resurgent, calling for radical spiritual solutions and encouraging apocalyptic thinking.

Colonial rule in this part of central Africa also brought with it colonial capitalism. This came in a variety of forms, but the development of the industrial and urban complex on the Copperbelt had a profound effect on the entire region, drawing in labour from a range of communities across central Africa. As Chapter III shows, diversity was an issue that this urbanized population itself grappled with. There may have been some similarities between death beliefs and burial practices amongst workers and their families drawn from across East Central Africa, but there were also significant differences that were remarked upon and had to be negotiated, particularly in the context of what the colonial authorities labelled ‘inter-tribal’ marriages. For example, though forms of ‘widow inheritance’ were practised by some communities providing labour to the Copperbelt, this was a completely alien custom to others, and could give rise to heated disputes between families. There were also marked differences in the ways in which rural communities in this region buried their dead and the extent to which they marked, or did not mark, the physical location of graves. Based on both extensive archival research and interviews we demonstrate how urban Copperbelt communities adapted their death practices to a new and restrictive environment, negotiated these practices between themselves and forged new ‘ways of death’. In particular, the ‘space of death’ took on a new meaning as increasing numbers of workers and their

families came to be buried in and around the mining towns rather than their bodies being repatriated to rural areas. The politics of death both mirrored and contributed to the larger politics of labour and industrialization in the colonial state.

As the rich literature on Copperbelt history demonstrates, colonial policy there was fraught with contradictions arising from a deep reluctance to recognize that this was, by the inter-war period, one of the largest urban concentrations of population in Africa. Committed to the idea that the permanent urbanization of Africans should be avoided at all costs, colonial authorities attempted to administer large heterogeneous urban populations through forms of 'tribal custom' long after this was plausibly practical (if indeed, it had ever been). Yet, at the same time, the reality of urbanization increasingly forced them (and the mining companies) to provide the basic infrastructure of urban living, and dying. Death was ever present on the Copperbelt in new and terrifying forms (mining accidents, industrial diseases) as well as the old ones, more frequently associated with village life (infant deaths, for example). Death makes certain urgent demands, both social and practical. Even if colonial authorities would have preferred the bodies of those they thought of as 'temporary migrants' to have been whisked away to their rural homes out of sight, they had an obligation under their own sanitary and health legislation to provide for the 'hygienic' disposal of corpses in urban areas, hence the provision of urban cemeteries.

British colonial policy toward the deaths of their Northern Rhodesia subjects certainly appears to have been less directly interventionist than that of some other colonial authorities in Africa, but as Chapters III and IV clearly demonstrate, the idea that they would be 'non-interventionist', and leave the work of burials to 'tradition', itself had significant consequences.⁵ Chapter III shows how, spearheaded by Malawian migrants, the urban dwellers on the Copperbelt drew on Christianity to

elaborate a shared set of death practices that implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, resisted the colonial 'tribal' imperative, and the chiefly authorities who were its agents. However, this process should not be imagined as a completely smooth or painless one. The precariousness of life on the mines and the continuous reminders of mortality spurred on the search for new death rites and a new and empowering 'culture of death'. The political consequences of this were complex and somewhat paradoxical. On the one hand, the mining companies welcomed (and even funded) the crusades of pastors such as J. Marumo. Marumo's faith empowered him to 'ridicule death', and he was widely attributed with diminishing the fear of death amongst mine labourers. On the other hand, the creation of new 'ways of death' on the Copperbelt took place in defiance of the 'traditional' leaders on whose exercise of authority the colonial administration depended. Defying traditional 'ways of death' then was a profoundly political act, and once new ways of managing death had been put in place, they themselves became the subject of further political struggles.

Defying pre-existing 'ways of death' was part of the wider struggle by the emerging urban African elite against the efforts of colonial authorities to extend to the Copperbelt the ritual authority of traditional rulers. While European authorities saw the extension of chiefly ritual power and authority as indispensable to the smooth working of Indirect Rule in the mining area, the elite saw such efforts as inimical to their claim to political power in urban settings. The African elite thus recreated their own mortuary and cemetery rituals, turning death into an arena for resisting Indirect Rule on the Copperbelt.

The urban cemetery was a 'hygienic' invention of the modern state, in this case a colonial state, and of the mining companies. But once appropriated by Africans and inhabited by their spirits (Christian or otherwise, they were never

entirely banished to the afterlife) it became a sacred and contested site. In the context of the politics of urban Zambia in the late colonial period, it is not surprising that the District Commissioner of Ndola's decision to exhume and relocate corpses from the African cemetery in 1956 produced nationalist outrage; nor was it surprising that racial segregation at death (the colour bar's extension to the cemetery) attracted hostile commentary. As Chapter V shows, by the early 1960s nationalists were actively appropriating Copperbelt funerals and quite directly exploiting their emotional and political potential, attracting thousands of participants. These events included the funerals of individuals who were not themselves party members. Strikingly, UNIP activists also organized large funerals for infants and children whose deaths, customarily, would not have been marked by elaborate events. This chapter argues that though these events may have drawn their inspiration from the pre-existing associations between mortuary rituals and political power, they expressed an entirely new politics in the way in which they 'were designed to attract all and sundry, irrespective of their diverse linguistic, cultural and ethnic affiliations'.

Party politics was not, however, the only thing on display in Copperbelt cemeteries in the late colonial period. They were also sites for the performance of emerging class and urban identities. Much has been written on the escalating cost of ever more elaborate funerals in contemporary Africa and the rise of a new funeral industry. We show in Chapter IV that these phenomena have a history. Expenditure on funerals attracted as much moral debate in the 1950s as it does now. And it was not only the middle-class elite who grappled with this issue. As informants made clear to one of us, 'ordinary' workers also felt that they should 'not be expected to carry our dead in a handcart and bury them in rags'. The provision of a decent and durable coffin became an important marker

of respectability, itself a highly sought after commodity in the context of the racial economy of colonial Zambia.

If Africans transformed cemeteries on the Zambian Copperbelt into sites for enacting their social and class identities, they also turned them into a terrain for performing new bureaucratic rituals through which they no less contested colonial hegemony than imagined a new political order. Besides singing political songs in cemeteries at the height of the freedom struggle in the 1950s and 1960s, African nationalists in the United National Independence Party (UNIP) regularly registered in funeral books the names of mourners attending burials, called out such names during interments, and demanded fiscal and other material contributions from mourners. In UNIP hands, therefore, cemeteries became an important arena where the party created new constituents, demonstrated its numerical strength, and defied colonial discourse that cast the modern cemetery as a place for quiet contemplation over death.

Chapter VI, the final essay in this section, turns directly to the inflammable racial politics of death on the Copperbelt in the 1960s. In 1960, the murder by nationalist activists of a European woman, Lilian Burton, not only drove a deep wedge between 'black' and 'white' in colonial Zambia, but also opened up fissures within these communities – between white conservatives and liberals, and between 'moderate' black nationalists and their more radical peers. While white conservative nationalists attempted to capitalize on her death to challenge both British colonial power (viewed as hopelessly emasculated) and African nationalism (now exposed in its 'savagery'), white liberals saw her death as 'a window through which they could improve race relations', a symptom of the urgent need for the supposed 'multiracial partnership' and liberal democracy promised by the Central African Federation. At the same time Mrs Burton's murder also provided an

opportunity for African opponents of UNIP to challenge its moral right to leadership of the nationalist movement.

Beyond deepening political polarization within the colony, the Lilian Burton murder aggravated relations between Whitehall and Lusaka. Convinced that British officials did not act decisively to contain 'African political hooliganism' after the death of Mrs Burton, some white settlers in colonial Zambia began to agitate for political disengagement from London. These settlers also saw in Mrs Burton's unfortunate death an opportunity to suppress African political demands. But not all settlers shared this vision. For liberal-minded Europeans were adamantly opposed to politics of exclusion and called for the integration of at least a few Western-educated Africans into the colonial socio-political mainstream, a call that was met with clenched fists from other settlers. Thus, the killing of Lilian Burton brought into sharp relief the competing political visions within the white settler community. These tensions remained unresolved up to the time Zambia became independent from British misrule.

In Chapter VII we examine the phenomenon of suicide. Historically African societies are thought to have had very low rates of suicide, but this is an assumption rather than a fact. Even today the inadequacy of data collection on suicide in Africa makes it very difficult to say anything definitive about rates or trends. This chapter addresses the intellectual history of suicide in Africa, and in particular the legacy of colonial psychiatry and psychological scholarship. The latter argued that African people were poorly individuated and lacked the sense of moral responsibility and guilt associated with depressive disorders and suicide. In essence, they were in general 'happy-go-lucky' people, and when misfortune befell them they blamed others (through the medium of witchcraft, for example), rather than themselves. This chapter critiques these assumptions through the examination of a body of

documentary evidence on suicide in late colonial Malawi. It then goes on to examine the evidence for recent increases in rates of suicide in East, Central and Southern Africa, and to analyse contemporary understandings of suicide as a symptom of a range of social, moral and political issues.

The final two chapters focus on two very different kinds of death in contemporary Malawi. Malawi has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world. Chapter VIII examines recent policymaking on this issue in the light of a longer history of moral responsibility and blame. It analyses the legacy of colonial maternal health interventions, the invention of the category 'traditional birth attendant' and the transformation of the practice of attributing difficulties in childbirth to the sexual behaviour of the mother (and, less frequently, the father). This allocation of responsibility now takes place within the context of an HIV/AIDS epidemic, under-resourced and under-staffed hospitals, and focuses less on sexual behaviour per se than on the supposed moral failings of women evidenced by their poverty. Meanwhile, medical staff are themselves subject to new regimes of 'accountability' in the form of the 'maternal death review' and medical audit.

Chapter IX turns to a very different and recent phenomenon – the creation of the mausoleum or 'houses for the dead'. It traces the politics of memorialization of Malawi's first President, Hastings Banda, and the political appropriation of his legacy by President Bingu wa Mutharika, culminating in the building of a new and elaborate mausoleum to house his body. The final part of the chapter explores the death of President Bingu himself, and his own burial in a mausoleum built for his late wife. These events speak very clearly to the contemporary politics of Malawi, and particularly to debates over the nature of democracy. The mausoleum is undoubtedly a new institution in Malawi, but the elaborate rituals of these two presidential deaths, and the politics that surrounded them,

are not without historical precedent in the region. We argue that they cannot be interpreted straightforwardly as evidence of what Mbembe calls the ‘necropolitics’ of the post-colonial state.⁶

A number of themes run through the papers that make up this volume. To argue that death is a deeply political subject is perhaps too obvious to need much elaboration. What Katherine Vedery calls the ‘political lives of dead bodies’ are very much in evidence in these chapters, most overtly in the elaborate burial rites of the Bemba Paramount Chief, in the burial and re-burial of President Hastings Banda of Malawi, and in the appropriation of funerals by nationalists on the Copperbelt in late colonial Zambia. Radical Christian movements envisioned the Last Judgement as the moment of political, as well as spiritual, truth, when colonial rule would be called to account. All of these dead bodies carry, and are made to carry, a range of political messages, and in many cases the disposal of the corpse becomes a political act in itself. But other deaths that feature in this volume are also politically meaningful, if not so overtly politically charged. Suicides today are frequently understood as symptoms of moral, social and political malaise. Deaths of women in childbirth have often been blamed on the moral conduct of the women themselves, but have also been the occasion for social and political autopsies. Today maternal deaths are inserted into an international political discourse on human rights and development. Improving Malawi’s maternal mortality rate is now an urgent political matter.

Also running through these papers are the spirits of the dead. The creation of urban cemeteries and the rise of a modern funeral industry have not desacralized death, and neither has Christianity – profoundly important as it is – completely succeeded in relocating the dead to an afterlife in another place and time. Caring for one’s dead is still a profoundly important part of the lives of the living in many parts of Africa,

and this means more than tending to their graves – it means tending to their needs and wishes and dealing with their frustrations and intrusions into one's own existence. Marital sexual relations had spiritual substance. The profound associations between sexuality and death have not gone away, but have been reconfigured in a region that has seen the devastating effects of a sexually transmitted disease.

None of these themes are peculiar to this region of Africa, nor to Africa as a whole. We can find parallels to and resonances of all of them in the wider comparative history of death. Death, we are reminded, is an experience shared by all of us, but ultimately faced by each of us alone. Religious believers prepare carefully for that moment. Insurance companies, keen to exploit the vibrant market for death-related products in Africa, do their best to persuade us that other kinds of preparation are also necessary. As you wait in the queue for the cashier in a South African supermarket, you can pick up, not only sweets and chewing gum, but also a neatly packaged funeral 'starter pack' to equip you for that final journey.

ENDNOTES: INTRODUCTION

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2. Rebekah Lee and Megan Vaughan, 'Death and Dying in the History of Africa Since 1800', *Journal of African History*, 49 (2008), 341–59; Rebekah Lee and Megan Vaughan, 'Introduction: Themes in the Study of Death and Loss in Africa', *African Studies*, 71, 2 (2012), 163–73.
3. Deborah James, 'Burial Sites, Informal Rights and Lost Kingdoms: Contesting Land Claims in Mpumalanga, South Africa', *Africa*, 79, 2 (2009), 228–51.
4. David M. Gordon, *Invisible Agents: Spirits in a Central African History* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2012).
5. On the more directly interventionist stance of French colonial authorities in Equatorial Africa see Florence Bernault, 'Body, Power and Sacrifice in Equatorial Africa', *Journal of African History*, 47 (2006), 207–39. On British colonial intervention in funeral practices in Ghana see Sandra Greene, *Sacred Sites and the Colonial Encounter: A History of Meaning and Memory in Ghana* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002).
6. Achille Mbembe, 'Necropolitics', *Public Culture*, 15 (2003), 11–40.

CHAPTER I

Translating the Soul: Death and Catholicism in Northern Zambia

Megan Vaughan

When priests of the White Fathers order first made their way into Bemba territory in what is now northern Zambia in the 1890s, they arrived onto a scene of death, in more ways than one. Here was a region decimated by the deathly traffic of the slave trade. Here was a dominant political culture (that of the Bemba 'Crocodile Clan') with a complex and powerful death ritual at the centre of its chiefly cult. And to add to this was the very public deathbed scene of Chief Mwamba, a powerful and much-feared Bemba chief, whose dying wishes were whispered into the ears of an ambitious young priest. These were perfect conditions, it would seem, for the preaching of a Christian gospel which promised that death need no more be feared and that the final sacrifice had been made.

The story of the White Fathers' mission to northern Zambia is served by a rich literature, which itself is in part the product of the wealth of documentation produced by the order and of its own powerful intellectual tradition. As Marja Hinfelaar and Giacomo Macola have argued, the ethnohistorical scholarly tradition of the White Fathers permeates the standard histories and is particularly unavoidable in relation to the history of belief systems.¹ This question has recently been explored in more depth by David M. Gordon, in his illuminating account of 'spiritual sovereignties' in Central Africa.² Zambian readers

will be familiar with the central lines of the history of the Catholic mission to northern Zambia and its relationship with the Bemba political system. My aim is not to completely retell a history which has already been fully explored in the rich corpus of work on Zambia's religious history. My focus is a narrower one, but one that I think has relevance for the wider debates on death and political culture in Africa that we have explored in the Introduction. This is a focus on the entanglements of a range of beliefs and practices on death in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in the political context of early colonial rule. Within this, my primary concern is with the White Fathers' mission, and the Catholic version of death, sacrifice and the afterlife contained within their doctrine. It should be borne in mind, however, that for the entire period covered here the White Fathers operated in a context of intense spiritual competition, not only with powerful pre-existing beliefs, but also with radical, new and sometimes apocalyptic visions derived from the teachings of their Protestant rivals in the region. The result was a complex landscape of ideas and practices connected to death and the afterlife and to ideas about sin, responsibility and temporality.

In the year 2000 the bones of Monseigneur Joseph Dupont, formerly Bishop of the Nyassa Province, were disinterred and transported from Tunisia to be reburied, with a mix of local ceremonial and Catholic ritual, at the Chilubula Mission in northern Zambia.³ Dupont's reburial was a reminder of his controversial claim to a kind of Bemba ancestry as well as to his position as a 'grandfather' of the Catholic Church in Zambia. Dupont had first arrived in what is now northern Zambia in 1895. Following the dictates of Charles Lavigerie, the founder of the *Société des Missionnaires d'Afrique*, Dupont and his colleagues worked explicitly with the assumption that the conversion of the politically powerful (in this case the peoples' chiefs) was essential to long-lasting and effective evangelization.

Dupont had been a restless seminarian in France who seems to have found personal fulfilment at the front in the Franco-Prussian war, and subsequently volunteered to put down the Paris Commune. Posted to the Lake Tanganyika region, at the heart of the east African slave trade, he had thrown himself into local politics, in one instance supplying men and guns to a chief under pressure from a rival. His fieriness, vigorous masculinity and hyperactivity had earned him the Swahili nickname 'Moto-Moto' (Fire Fire). Although the White Fathers had an active commitment to opposing the slave trade, which they demonstrated in East Africa, this commitment did not always sit easily with their desire to pursue powerful rulers as converts. Moving in from the east, Dupont's sights were set on the powerful Bemba chiefs, and he seems to have been barely able to contain his impatience at having to spend so much time waiting in the wings with the Mambwe communities who had been victims of Bemba aggression.⁴ It would later be the source of some embarrassment to Dupont that, having first learned ciBemba whilst living in Mambwe communities, he spoke the language more as a slave than a chief.

When Dupont finally obtained an invitation from a Bemba chief and made his first foray into the centre of Bemba regional power, it was an entry into a world in which the politics of death were already extremely potent. Some of this he knew, and consciously manipulated, but he cannot have known it all. The Bemba chiefs of the Crocodile Clan were incomers to the region, and their power derived from a complex mixture of military and spiritual authority. David Gordon has recently re-emphasized this aspect of the Bemba polity, though it is also present less explicitly in earlier analyses of Bemba political culture.⁵ In common with other conquering groups in Central Africa, Bemba chiefs had to negotiate spiritual authority with existing communities, even when holding sway militarily. Bemba spiritual conquest was never complete, and the violence

with which some Bemba chiefs asserted themselves in the nineteenth century can be read as a symptom of insecurity. Extremes of violence can open up spaces for alternative versions of the relationship between earthly conduct and spiritual worlds, and ultimately for different understandings of time. For some these alternative visions took root in mainstream Christianity with its teachings on sin, death and the afterlife; for others in less orthodox and more volatile interpretations of the Bible.

The legend of Bemba origins has adultery and murder at its heart, a story that seems to invite a psychoanalytic reading.⁶ It begins with the marriage between a hunter and a woman who came from the sky, who belonged to the Crocodile Clan. The marriage produces three sons, who incur the wrath and jealousy of their father. Banished, they flee to the east. One of the sons, Chiti, is attracted by the tattooed skin of the wife of a hunter, Mwase, and is seduced by her. Chiti, is murdered for his sexual transgression. His body is preserved at a sacred place, Mwalule. Rich in symbolism, this founding tradition, as Gordon argues, also needs to be read as an 'emotional tragedy that describes a family feud, the fleeing of sons, exile, an illicit desire, and an adulterous relationship that leads to death and revenge and – more death'.⁷ The funerary rites of chiefs of the Crocodile Clan re-enact this foundational legend. The death of every major chief (but most particularly the death of the Paramount, Chitimukulu) entailed the sacrifice of human and animal victims, an elaborate mortuary ritual including the preservation of the remains in the same sacred grove, Mwalule, guarded over by a ritual specialist who was required to submit to his own death once all his duties had been performed. The death of a Chitimukulu in theory (and, it seems, sometimes in practice) brought time to a halt for as much as an agricultural season as all the necessary rites were enacted and the body of the chief satisfactorily desiccated to resemble a seed – the

seed of new beginnings. Suspended sexual relations could then be resumed, planting could take place and continuity was assured by a new man assuming the title of Chitimukulu.

As I discuss in Chapter II, generations of social anthropologists have debated whether Bemba chiefs were African examples of 'Divine Kings'.⁸ The answer to this question is probably less important than the more straightforward observation that Bemba legend and practice made much of the relationship between the body of the chief and the body politic, and that sexual transgression and death lay at the heart of that legend. This sex/death link was the point at which the remote chiefly politics of what was a far-flung, sparsely populated polity were connected to the everyday life of subjects. While the chief's body was in a liminal state there was to be no sex, no new children, no new fires, no planting. Chiefly rituals found their counterparts in powerful ideas operating at the level of every marital home.⁹ Sexual transgression could cause death, as many women experiencing the dangerous process of childbirth were reminded. But ritualized sexual acts at the end of a period of mourning were also the key to ensuring that the life of the community would survive the deaths of its individual members. Bemba chiefly death practices were dramatic, terrifying and elaborate, but their central function was that of mortuary rites across the world: to ensure the continuity of life. Christian missionaries did not always see them in this light. In particular, the custom of 'removing' death from a surviving spouse (*ukupyana*), which was central to ensuring that a fertile life could be restored, untroubled by the spirit of the dead person, was a major point of contention for both Protestant and Catholic missionaries.

As it happens, there was a minor sideshow to the central story of Bemba origins, and this involved a 'white' man, Luchele Ng'anga, a liberator in blinding light, arriving from the east. Joseph Dupont, fiery and apparently fearless, dressed in the

white robes of his order, may have looked a little like the promised reincarnation of this mythical figure. But the Bemba chiefs were not immediately impressed by the Catholic presence and were certainly not blinded by the light of a white man. In fact, they already had a number of white men to contend with, including the armed imperialists of the British South African Company. They were in no hurry to meet Dupont and kept him waiting. Eventually Chief Makasa, and then the much more powerful Mwamba Mubanga, saw that an alliance with Dupont might be to their advantage.¹⁰ Mwamba had a well-deserved reputation for cruelty. Bemba chiefs were expected to make a spectacle of physical violence, but Mwamba seems to have been in danger of undermining their collective legitimacy through his profligacy in this regard. His eagerness to lop off the limbs of his subjects was legendary. It was also documented in early colonial photographs, which made good propaganda material for colonial rulers justifying the ‘pacification’ of this region. Even allowing for the exaggerations and hype to which European observers were prone, there seems little doubt that when Dupont and his colleagues arrived in Mwamba territory, many of his subjects were living in a state of terror.

Chief Mwamba may have been a tyrant but he was also a sick man when he finally admitted Dupont to his court in 1898, and it is clear that the knowledge that his own death was near played a crucial part in this decision. There is no evidence that this reflected a desire to hear the Christian message. Rather he saw in Dupont an unusual opportunity to undermine the political ambitions of his rivals. In an extraordinary deathbed scene, heavily reworked in the Catholic retelling, Mwamba apparently announced that he wished Dupont to take over his responsibilities at his death and ‘inherit’ his wives. It is clear from the archival records that Dupont was himself very sick at this point, probably with blackwater fever. But he did not

hallucinate the entire event, and soon the word got around (with his complicity) that the new Chief Mwamba was no other than the White Father. Dupont had not yet succeeded in converting a powerful Bemba chief – he seemed to have gone one step further and become one.¹¹ The legend of the White Mwamba was born, and it was one which would have a lasting impact on the politics of the region and which resonated in 2000 with the reburial of Dupont's remains.

Of course, things were not so simple. Mwamba was unlikely to have seriously proposed Dupont as his successor, and in any case the choice was not in his hands. It seems implausible that Mwamba's subjects would have viewed Dupont as anything more than a rather unusual counsellor. Hugo Hinfelaar suggests that Dupont and his colleagues may have been placed in the role of guardians whose task it was to care for the country in the hazardous 'cold' period of the interregnum.¹² The authorities of the British South Africa Company meanwhile were furious with the Frenchman for meddling in local politics. The missionaries noted in their diaries that on the night of Mwamba's death (23 to 24 October 1899), between four and five thousand people fled from his court and surroundings, fearing for their lives. The priests watched from the sidelines as the long process of chiefly death ritual took its course, culminating in the burial of Mwamba's remains at Mwalule and the appointment of a new chief.

There is no doubt that Dupont was ready to make the most of the rather fortuitous timing of his entry into the Bemba heartland at the moment of a high-profile death. He liked to think of himself as a match for Bemba chiefs, but he also knew to tread carefully when it came to the politically sensitive question of burials, particularly those of individuals from significant lineages. The evangelization of the region was conducted for the most part by catechists, whose training occupied much of the priests' time. The burials of early

converts generally took place in their own villages, overseen by catechists, and were almost certainly an amalgam of local and Christian practice.¹³ Only slowly did burials become spiritual battlegrounds.

It would be entirely wrong to imply that the early White Fathers were solely concerned with politicking with the chiefly powers of death. Suffering and death provided them with an entry point into the lives of ordinary people, and these engagements were sincere, even if they sometimes served as lessons. As Brian Garvey notes, many Bemba became Christians on their deathbeds, and in local terms this meant the beginnings of a community of Christian ancestors.¹⁴ In the early days of the mission baptizing the dying occupied a huge amount of the priests' time and energy, as has been noted in studies of Catholicism in other parts of East/Central Africa.¹⁵ In his instructions to fellow missionaries Dupont made much of the necessity of performing this duty. Not to do so, he reminded them, was a grave sin.¹⁶ In a population with a high mortality rate, particularly of infants, this obligation was an onerous one and could not be practicably left to a few priests, or even to catechists. Anyone professing to be a Christian was urged to perform a simple blessing on a dying child. Midwives were reminded of this duty, which included the blessing of the stillborn and premature or deformed fetuses, and of the necessity of removing infants (alive or dead) from the bodies of mothers who had died in childbirth.

The instructions were detailed and graphic, but there were numerous complications in putting them into practice, not least the 'superstitious' belief that baptism itself caused, or at the very least hastened, the deaths of infants. Some parents hid their dying from the priests and catechists, fearful of the soul-saving ministrations. In 1900 the priests at Chilubula were congratulating themselves on having carried out four infant

baptisms. But in the following year, as a smallpox epidemic swept through the region, women increasingly hid away their infants. One woman explained, 'Baptism killed my first child. I have fear for the second.'¹⁷ In their diary entries the missionaries reported on their frustrations – the obstinate parents, the superstitious midwives, the frequent excursions to deathbeds in the middle of the night. But the fate of souls after death was a central concern to them, no matter how frustrating the task of saving them might be. For the priests, and for the young male catechists who now roamed the countryside on the lookout for the dying, deathbed baptisms of adults provided satisfying narratives of the progress of the new religion.¹⁸ Apocryphal stories were told of last-minute conversions, amongst them that of the 'sorcerer' who, having resisted numerous attempts at baptism over a number of days, in his final moments ('when thanks to the grace of God, Satan was vanquished') uttered the few words necessary to allow a priest to perform the ritual in good faith.¹⁹ Dramatic instances of 'deathbed' baptisms followed by recovery invited speculations on divine intervention, and catechists reported instances where their prayers over the seriously ill had been heard. In 1914 Dismas Musabandesu, a catechist at Chilubula, told the Father Superior that he had been called by a father to minister to his dying child: 'Our child is on the point of death, all day we have called on the spirits, but nothing has happened... come to our help, pray over our child.' Arriving at the hut he had knelt and prayed with the mother and father, after which he had returned to his home, and prayed for the child before retiring to bed. 'But,' said the Father Superior, 'you left without baptizing the child. Did you not fear that the child would die without having been baptized?' Dismas replied, 'But, Bwana, I had passed the child into the hands of God, so how could he have died unbaptized?' The next day he had found the child recovered.²⁰

Though they were liberal with deathbed baptisms, priests and catechists drew the line at baptizing polygamists. Some men were persuaded, at the very last minute, to renounce all but one wife and allow the rite to be performed.²¹ Others, possibly anxious about the consequences of such an act for their surviving wives and their children, refused. In one such 'resistant pocket of paganism', as late as 1922, one man's fear of being baptized was so great that it 'resuscitated' him. On hearing the one word 'baptism' from the mouths of catechists who had entered his hut, he found the strength to get up and tell them that he was, in fact, perfectly well.²²

Though Dupont's central ambition had been to convert the chiefly elite, inevitably mission stations also acted as magnets for those living in fear of chiefly violence and ritual practice. These included the socially marginal, who dreaded lonely deaths as outcasts. This was a region haunted by the recent history of the slave trade and marked by harsh social hierarchies that expressed themselves at times of death. The priests were critical of the local practice (how widespread is not clear) of removing dying 'strangers' (presumably people of slave origins) from villages in order to avoid pollution. They blamed the women for this practice and saw Satan behind it. They brought the abandoned sick to the mission stations, baptized them and, unless relatives collected their bodies, buried them in the mission cemeteries alongside missionaries. In December 1895, for example, the priests in Kayambi 'rescued' a child who had been 'thrown out of the village to die, because if he died in the village his whole family would be enslaved to the chief'.²³ In Mamwbe country, Paula, thrown out of the village by her relatives, was brought to the mission by a priest and baptized. Hearing that she was there, her family arrived and pleaded with the priest to give her medicine. Paula reportedly refused, saying, 'No, I died long ago, I only ask that God places me in Paradise.'²⁴ In the years around the turn of the century, when

the usual death toll was further increased by smallpox epidemics and famines, the priests were sometimes overwhelmed with the numbers of sick and dying abandoned near the mission stations. They brought them in, nursed them through the last stages of their lives or, occasionally, back to health. It was an act that left a deep impression, particularly on the socially marginal. From 1915 to 1916, when the region was again devastated by famine, the priests at Chilubula reported that the practice of removing the dying from the villages was being challenged. In Chief Munena's village a starving 'stranger' had arrived from Kayambi, hoping for help from his father. Seeing that he was dying, his father began to carry him out of the village, but the chief intervened and ordered the man to be brought back: 'The Fathers at Chilubula have shown us that this old custom is execrable, I don't want it to be practised here! Bring the man to me...'²⁵

Occasionally the missions also acted as refuges for members of chiefly families fearing for their own lives when a chief had died, as in the dramatic case of the wife of Chief Nkula who had reportedly been due to be buried with her husband, but who was rescued at the last moment by her relatives and fled to Kilonga Mission.²⁶ Chilubula Mission, in the heart of Mwamba's chieftaincy, was the scene of two high-profile suicides in 1907 and 1910. In both instances a local village headwoman was murdered by her husband, who then committed suicide on mission ground. In the first of these cases, Nsalu had killed his wife, Na Ndola, and then his father-in-law. Na Ndola's body was brought to the mission. The priests found themselves watching over a deteriorating corpse whilst her relatives sought a cow skin suitable for use in the burial. Eventually this was found, and the body removed for burial in the village. But four days later they heard a gunshot in the night and found the body of Nsalu in the church. He had shot himself through the throat. The priests baptized him, which

seems to indicate that he was not a Christian. Nevertheless he seems to have internalized a Christian imagery of death. In the notebook they found on him he had written:

I am a traveller on the way to the sky. I am going to the Good God in the sky where I will find the Father, the Holy Spirit and the Son who came to save us. I am going to rejoin my wife Na Ndola. I am going to the sky on this very day, the Lord's day. It is he who said 'a man must marry a woman'. My wife and I we are with glory in the sky...²⁷

In an alarmingly similar incident in 1910, the woman who had succeeded the first Na Ndola as headwoman was herself murdered by her husband. She was a Christian and was buried (with the permission of Chief Mwamba) in the Chilubula Mission cemetery 'with all the honours appropriate to her rank as princess'.²⁸ Two weeks later the murderer hanged himself at the door of the church. The priests speculated on the reasons for this choice of location and concluded that it was probably an attempt to ensure that his body would receive a burial. Local practice denied this to suicides, an act that was regarded as profoundly polluting: 'This is what our people say, and they understand better than us – the desire for burial appears to be rooted more deeply in the brain of the black than the instinct for self-preservation.'²⁹

As we will see, the priests frequently accused local people of burying the dead too quickly and then mourning them too loudly and for too long. But death is a shared human experience and they were also moved by the attentiveness and concern of catechists, converts and non-Christians, who crowded round the beds of dying priests and nuns, and by the genuine tears and sadness expressed by villagers at missionary deaths. And these were frequent, particularly in the first decade or so. Joseph Dupont had been close to death on several occasions

with blackwater fever. In 1893, before his arrival in Bemba country, he had left instructions for his funeral and had been administered the last rites. But as All Saints' Day dawned, he had recovered his strength.³⁰ The deaths of missionaries were public, exemplary deaths, and were sometimes explicitly used to evoke the idea of sacrifice. When the Father Superior died at St Joseph's Mission in Ngumbo in 1910, this was the first death of a missionary witnessed by local people, who were left in a 'state of stupefaction and sadness'. Large numbers of villagers arrived for his burial the next day to follow his coffin, 'curiously but respectfully' to the grave.³¹ Mother Euphemie died at Chilubula on the morning of the Day of Ascension in 1914. Her body was laid 'like an offering' at the foot of the statue of Christ, her face 'imprinted with the gentle tranquillity of those who have fallen asleep with the Lord' and was the object of 'continual veneration by our dear blacks'.³²

The death process, particularly when the cause was blackwater fever, was a well-known one, but it still required constant vigilance to ensure that confession and the last rites were performed satisfactorily. This careful attention to the stages of death contrasted with what appeared to local eyes to be the relative simplicity of Catholic funeral rites. Each missionary death and each missionary funeral stood as a lesson in the correct Christian ways of death: the silence, the prayers, the laying out of the corpse, the wake, the mass and the simple burial. And then the moving on. Local people were apparently astonished at the brevity of mourning and its abrupt ending once the funeral rites were completed. Of course, the church did have a festival dedicated specifically to the remembrance of the dead – All Saints' and All Souls' Day – and in some parts of the world subject to mission Catholicism this 'took off' in a spectacular way, symbolizing a dynamic interaction between local and Christian beliefs around death and the spirit world.³³ But, for reasons that will become clearer in the next section

of this chapter, the White Fathers introduced the '*culte des morts*' cautiously among their converts, and they in turn responded in lukewarm fashion. The priests at Chilubula introduced All Saints' Day to their converts with a procession to the cemetery in 1915, and the following year wrote that there had been a 'crowd' at the same occasion.³⁴ But in later years they reported a lack of enthusiasm for the celebration. The Christian cemetery, it seems, was a site that inspired fear. The priests knew this, and must only have reinforced it when they punished wayward converts by ordering them to sweep it. Burial in the mission cemetery meant separation from the village community and from the community of ancestors. The Cross symbolized the 'corpse of Jesus' and was an object of fear as well as veneration for Christians. One elderly Christian woman, on the point of dying in 1937, explained to the priests: 'I do not want a Cross on my grave. If the shades of my parents should see the Cross they would not accept me into their village.'³⁵

By the 1920s, and in the context of acute competition with Protestant missionaries and independent church movements, there was some hardening of attitudes toward burials, though this varied from mission station to mission station. Now the concern was less with conversion and more with retaining converts and ensuring that they did not 'backslide'. Burials sometimes became battlegrounds, or scenes of dramatic stand-offs between priests and local spiritual leaders. Hinfelaar characterizes this as a period of 'narrowing' of the White Fathers' attitudes toward women and sexual matters, and an increasing tendency to view local customs with repulsion.³⁶ The White Fathers were particularly critical of the customs of the Bisa-speaking people, who in the nineteenth century had been subjugated to the Bemba.³⁷ When the aunt of the Bisa Chief Matipa died at Chilubi (a promontory on Lake Bangweulu) in 1922, the Father Superior of the mission sent his condolences

to the chief and told him that there should be 'no singing or dancing', to which Matipa apparently agreed. Two days later, however, 'licentious dancing' was reportedly taking place. The priests were outraged: 'In a word, in the time between the death and the burial of a member of the royal family, anything is permitted. God's commandments do not exist.'³⁸ Two catechists were despatched with a letter asking the Chief to end the dancing. The burial took place the following day. The catechists reported back that the body had been decomposing and the head detaching itself from the trunk. 'Paganism,' the priests concluded, 'is not dead at Chilubi, however, it is ill.'

Another high-profile death of a Christian chief in the same parish the following year provided an opportunity for the priests to continue their campaign against local burial customs. It was a campaign that very quickly became politicized. At the announcement of Shi-Mulira's death a catechist was despatched with a letter, expressing condolences and reminding those in charge of funeral rites of the need for 'profound silence'. All drums, other than the *mangu*, which was used to announce the death, must be silent until after the burial. Weeping, they were reminded, was only admissible around the coffin itself. There should be no singing and dancing, for singing and dancing are an insult to the memory of the dead. The letter was received. The dancing began. 'Hundreds and thousands' of dancers assembled; the noise could be heard for miles. Father Ragoen, demonstrating considerable sangfroid, arrived on the scene to remonstrate, but his presence provoked 'insolence' and uproar. He eventually retired, consoling himself that 'the feast is spoilt'. But the situation escalated. The 'owner of the funeral', protesting that the spirit of the dead man would avenge itself if the funeral rites were not performed properly, appealed to the British colonial authorities for permission to proceed with the funeral. The District Commissioner listened to the request and granted it, warning that any 'theft or

adultery' would be severely punished. The priests protested that, 'We have neither whip nor chain to constrain anyone. Our task is to instruct. We will not cease to repeat that to dance around the coffin is to dishonour the dead, and that the dead weep when they hear weeping...'

The priests got their way. Six days after his death, Shi-Mulira was buried with Christian rites. Just one slow drumbeat sounded as the procession made its way to the grave. The Ave Maria was repeated, softly. The coffin was lowered into the grave by the catechists. A simple cross was erected over the grave. Shi-Mulira was 'in the sky'. A blessing was said over his village and the parish diary recorded that 'all's well that ends well'.³⁹

The missionaries' passionate opposition to the 'noise' and 'dancing' that accompanied traditional funerals was visceral. The deafening and frenetic sound of the drums, the endless wailing, the sweat of the dancers – the whole sensual experience of the funeral rites and their explicit expression of sexuality drove the priests mad, as it did their Protestant counterparts. The specific link made in local culture between death and sexuality was particularly problematic for Christian missionaries, and forms part of the subject of Chapter II. In his detailed account of Bemba burial practices and beliefs concerning death, Edouard Labrecque, one of Dupont's more eminent successors, portrayed Bemba as at once terrorized by the polluting power of death, and at the same time insufficiently fearful, at the individual level, of the consequences of dying.⁴⁰ Resignation at the inevitability of death, widely expressed in proverbs, was matched by fear of death as something mysterious and ultimately unknowable. Death was a 'polluting factor', entailing extensive rites of purification if the living were to be able to resume their living after a death. Through these rites the living aim to 'cover their tracks so that Death won't be able to reach them and strike them down also...'

This was a particularly acute need in the case of married couples. The practice of *ukupyana* or *bupyani*, the aim of which was the purification of the surviving spouse of a deceased man or woman, brought missionaries into direct conflict with converts and would-be converts precisely because it went to the heart of the central concern of the local political and spiritual economy – to ensure continuity and fertility. For the people of this part of Central Africa, as elsewhere on the continent, marriage was an institution that joined together social groups (especially, in this case, clans) as well as individuals, and was central to both biological and social reproduction. Consequently marital intimacy was a matter of public concern. Sexual intimacy in the context of marriage entailed an exchange of spiritual substance between husband and wife. At death a portion of this substance of the dead person clung to the surviving spouse and would have to be removed, and returned to the dead person's clan, so as to enable the surviving spouse to carry on living. Labrecque described it like this:

The disembodied soul or *mupashi* [of the deceased] still belongs to the clan. This makes life very awkward for the surviving partner in marriage. The partner retains remnants of death ... The partner is contaminated and under many taboos ... Because of the intimacy of conjugal relations between husband and wife, a parcel of the deceased couple must of necessity have clung to the surviving partner. If the disembodied soul of the dead couple wants to come back to earth, it has something concrete to adhere to in the former partner who is still alive. The clan of the disembodied soul is dead [*sic*] scared of this eventuality because the disembodied soul belongs exclusively to the clan ... [it] must be recovered... ⁴¹

This 'recovery' was effected by the surviving spouse having sexual relations with an appointed member of the dead

person's clan. Sexual intercourse would return that portion of the dead person's *mupashi* where it belonged, and it would 'eat death' (*ukulya mfwa*), leaving the widow or widower freed of the pollution of death and of the taboos surrounding it. Though Labrecque recorded these customs with a degree of scholarly distance, they raised several immediate problems for the missionaries and were the source of enduring tensions and conflicts between missionaries and their converts. These tensions operated at a number of different levels. Most obviously the performance of a ritual sexual act outside marriage was itself abhorrent and sinful, all the more so when (as was often the case) one of the partners was married. Secondly, *ukupyana* was sometimes followed by widow inheritance within a polygamous marriage. Though the White Fathers acknowledged that this practice appeared to be designed to ensure that widows and children would be cared for when a man died, they could not condone it. The death of a married adult was an occasion that, for local people, threatened the fertility and continued reproduction of the entire community. A surviving spouse who had not been 'cleansed' of the remnants of their dead husband or wife was dangerous to others. Typically, a widow who was suspected of not having undergone the cleansing ritual correctly might be accused of causing infertility and child death in her family, and she was an immediate danger to any future sexual partner. The practice of *ukupyana*, then, was literally a matter of life or death and was invested with strong emotions, on the part of both local people and missionaries. And for the Catholic priests it raised a larger and more fundamental question: the nature of death itself. Though Christianity held out the prospect of life after death, indeed the ultimate conquest of death, it also insisted that death was a radical break with life on earth. Furthermore, death, for the Catholic priests, was the occasion of judgement of the individual. Saving souls depended

centrally on conveying this message. But first of all the soul needed to be translated.

Translating the Soul and the Afterlife

In the 1930s Edouard Labrecque wrote a long and carefully researched study of Bemba customs. Amongst other subjects, his enquiry addressed the question of the understanding of death and its relationship to morality. Under the heading 'For Africans There is no Such Thing as Remuneration After Death', he wrote:

Our people do not seem to know what is the cornerstone of morality, of ethics: that God has given Man commandments to follow, and that Man has the (doubtful) privilege of transgressing them. As a logical consequence, our people do not believe in divine judgement after death and of sanctions penalising sinners... Fear of death is reduced to the mere basic instinct of self-preservation and survival, with no apprehension for anything else. They accept their fate as mortals without difficulty. Death is only a painful, but transient moment to live through, an unpleasant medicine, difficult to swallow.⁴²

Labrecque went on to provide a detailed account of Bemba funerary customs as practised in the 1930s, which can be placed alongside and compared to those provided by the social anthropologist, Audrey Richards.⁴³ Labrecque was representative of the scholarly, ethnographic strand of the White Fathers' mission. His attention to the minutiae of funerary practice and the symbolism of burial rites was in part driven by a very practical, though religiously motivated concern, which was to determine a scale of 'sinfulness' in relation to local customs.

This was a specific focus of the Catholic faith, not shared by the Protestant missionaries in the region who, though they also condemned local burial practices, do not appear to have documented them with such forensic attention to detail. Labrecque's account was also concerned with the thought system underlying practice. His central conclusion was that though Bemba peoples (and neighbouring groups) feared death, they feared it for the wrong reasons.

There is some sense to this conclusion. Central African belief systems around death were complex and not easily summarized. People were fearful of the potential powers of angry, jealous and neglected spirits of the dead to cause illness and death. And they were acutely aware that death could linger if you did not deal with it by carefully performing all the burial rites that would ensure the safe transition of the deceased to the state of ancestorhood. But in general people were fearful of death because of its consequences for the living. The closest that belief systems in this region came to a concept of hell was to be a living person haunted by a vengeful spirit, or dying without issue and family – the kind of existence that made the state of slavery a living death.⁴⁴ This philosophy was clearly expressed in 1930 by a Protestant convert in neighbouring Nyasaland:

We do not believe in a future hell of any kind, nor do we believe a man's earthly works survive with him after death to be reckoned with in the spirit world. Man is amply punished for his sins in this very world. He knows quite well that he has to pay for his misdeeds in this same world; for breaking taboos secretly or openly he suffers serious illness, even death...⁴⁵

Christian converts needed to be taught to fear death in a new way, before they could understand and appreciate the message

of salvation and the conquest of death that Christianity promised.⁴⁶ A new, more individualized concept of sin had to be embedded, as well as a new vision of hell.⁴⁷ Death then was at the heart of a new Christian morality, and the White Fathers were as enthusiastic as their Protestant counterparts about preaching on the wrath of God and the torments of hell. Hellfire sermons, featuring death and submission to God's justice were thought by the priests to have a powerful salutary effect on converts. In a 1927 study, Father Collibault argued that the principal motive for conversion was fear of God's justice.⁴⁸ It followed from this that penance was a popular sacrament in the region, resonating with local ideas of purification following the infringement of taboos. Brian Garvey remarks that 'it is one of the interesting paradoxes of evangelization in Bembaland that much of its success depended on transforming a traditional Bemba notion of a remote but vaguely benevolent "Lesa" into that of a vengeful God.' He adds that if this attitude seems to resonate with an outmoded Jansenism, this is because the priests, even in the 1930s, worked with a nineteenth-century catechism and belonged to a 'strict and defensive tradition'.⁴⁹

In his monumental work on the emergence of a 'Western guilt culture' in Europe between the thirteenth and eighteenth centuries, Jean Delumeau devotes a great deal of space to the subject of death.⁵⁰ Delumeau traces the spread and influence of the notion of 'contempt for the world', from St Paul onwards. A contemptuous contemplation of all that is bodily and worldly arises from the idea that humanity is in league with the forces of evil, and although Christ has redeemed us, we will not gain from that redemption until the end of time. Death is central to this outlook. Delumeau shows that though attitudes to death became more diverse with the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, essentially they involved a familiarization with death and a contemplation of it. But this contemplation had

to be carefully channelled, not least because of the resilience of popular beliefs and practices, such as the belief in ghosts, which assumed an intimacy not only with death but also with the dead themselves and of an on-going communication with them. The dead were to be prayed *for*, not talked *to*. If these issues were far from straightforward in mediaeval and modern Europe, they became even more complex when Christianity was exported to other parts of the world.⁵¹

For the Catholic missionaries in this part of Central Africa, the critical point was to insist that though Christianity offered the promise of life after death, this could only be enjoyed if converts first accepted that the dead were truly dead and removed from this world. They could not be addressed directly, they could not be blamed for the misfortunes of the world and they could not be asked to intercede (unless they were saints who formed a distinct category of the dead). You could pray for the souls of your ancestors, but you could not talk to them. The afterlife was not continuous with life on earth, hence the missionaries' disapproval of the custom of burying the dead in upright or seating positions with their belongings at hand, ready to leap into life in the world of the ancestors. The solace of the afterlife was only available to those who accepted the radical break that was death, and who had prepared for their deaths by confessing their sins.

In promoting new ideas about death, as in all areas of their work, missionaries were faced with the opportunities and dangers of translation, an issue that has received a significant amount of attention from scholars of Christianity in Africa, including scholars of this region.⁵² Much of this scholarship has focused on Protestant missionaries and their translations of the Bible, since literacy and access to 'the Word' were so critically important to Protestantism. But Catholic missionaries, though working in a more 'oral' mode, could not avoid the dilemmas of translation, even when they aimed to introduce

a completely new vocabulary. Indeed, they were alive to what they saw as the dangers of syncretism inherent in the project of translation.⁵³ Word choice was critical for all missionaries. Choose the wrong words for God or the Holy Spirit and you may have made a statement with powerful political as well as spiritual consequences. Concepts might be rendered over-familiar or so alien as to be inaccessible. Translation was never final and as Birgit Meyer has argued, was always by its nature a process of comparison.⁵⁴

The catechism was the central vehicle of instruction for early converts to Catholic Christianity in the region. Candidates for adult baptism were required to demonstrate a word-for-word knowledge of the catechism, not as readers, but as listeners and speakers. Catholic teaching was fundamentally an oral exercise, unlike its Protestant counterpart. Dupont seems to have harboured no doubts over the value of rote learning. In a 1909 circular to missionaries he instructed them to 'imprint the text firmly in their memories: they will understand it when they need it'.⁵⁵ The first catechism in the Bemba language (or what passed for it) was printed in France in 1900.⁵⁶ It was derived from a catechism that had been used in the White Fathers' missions in Algeria, and consisted of thirty-four pages of questions and answers followed by prayers and hymns.⁵⁷ Learning local languages in-depth was central to the White Fathers' practice, but inevitably linguistic competence was variable. Dupont's ciBemba was notoriously something of an amalgam with the language of the Mambwe people, and the catechism was much criticized, but it remained in use until 1952, with only minor changes to orthography and with longer appendices.⁵⁸ It was the central text through which Catholics learned the tenets of their religion. It was the text through which they learned of man's creation by God, his fall from grace and his redemption. It was a text that spoke directly of death, the afterlife and the soul.

Translating the concept of the soul was never going to be straightforward. In 1931 the British social anthropologist, Audrey Richards, working in the area, wrote to Father Roy on this subject. She began with the word *mupashi* (pl. *mipashi*), which is usually translated as ‘spirit’, or sometimes ‘soul’:

I am puzzled trying to get a coherent account of what a *mupashi* really is: but I daresay I am attempting to find a logical explanation of something which is very indefinite in native belief. For instance, is the *mupashi* the only ‘soul’ or animating principle of the body?⁵⁹

There followed a set of other questions. Was the *mupashi* internal or external to the body? Did it leave the body at death, or cling to the corpse? How far were the *mipashi* of a man and a woman united in marriage? How did the *mupashi* relate to the concepts of *mutima* and *mweo*? And what on earth was the *chinshingwa*? ‘I don’t know whether the *chinshingwa* is a sort of bodily soul which leaves the body in sleep, unconsciousness, or death, while the *mupashi* is a sort of guardian spirit which protects a man throughout his life.’

‘*Chère mademoiselle*,’ replied Roy. It was a long response, which in essence acknowledged that there were a number of overlapping concepts in Bemba thought to describe animating forces and non-corporeal entities. As Roy’s reply implied, and as Richards’ own investigations confirmed, each one of these concepts was quite complex, their interaction more so. The concept of *mupashi*, for example, was not individuated in the same manner as a Christian soul. The Bemba *mupashi* (like its equivalents in many African thought systems) was a social entity, a ‘spirit’ that was inherited from generation to generation and person to person, though it was also thought to have a distinctive character. At death, the *mupashi* of an individual would have to find another location – sometimes a

newborn baby yet to be named. The *mipashi* were also the spirits of the ancestors. Indeed, it was to the *mipashi* that Bemba addressed many of their ritual acts. The *mupashi* was not the same as that other spiritual entity, the *chinshingwa*, which only came into existence at death and was a kind of 'shadow' that needed to be 'taken off' if the living were to get on with living without danger.⁶⁰ This is without even considering the important concepts of the *mutima*, the organic and spiritual heart of an individual, and the *mweo*, the breath or life-giving essence. In addition there was the *ciwa*, a vengeful spirit of a wronged person, which could wreak havoc on the living. The missionaries often translated this as the 'demons' or the 'Devil', with unfortunate results, since a *ciwa* was not, in local thought, an unredeemable entity.⁶¹

Audrey Richards was neither the first nor the last outsider to wonder at the complexity of Bemba spiritual concepts, which included, in addition to this list, an important array of territorial and nature spirits.⁶² By contrast the Christian 'soul', though itself a complex concept, seems simple and reductive. A recent and very thorough attempt to explore the complexities of Bemba spiritual concepts relating to personhood is Robert Badenburg's 1999 study of *The Body, Soul and Spirit Concept of the Bemba of Zambia*.⁶³ In this work Badenburg, a Protestant missionary, discusses at length the overlapping concepts of *mupashi* and *mutima*, their relationship to the body, and their fate after the death of an individual. He also examines the (inconsistent) ways in which these concepts have been used in successive Protestant translations of the Bible into ciBemba.⁶⁴ All of these earnest and scholarly attempts to translate between Christian and local spiritual concepts recognize the dangers and difficulties inherent in the task. They are appropriately full of hesitation and conditional clauses. But in translating the catechism, to be read out loud and learned by heart, there was no room for

footnotes, or indeed for any hesitation over the fate of the soul of the sinner.⁶⁵

Learning by rote certainly has the effect of imprinting certain words on the mind. But the fact that Dupont's 1900 catechism was by all accounts linguistically confused and confusing to Bemba speakers may have had the unintended effect of stimulating discussion as to the precise meanings of the questions and answers of which it was composed, including those critical questions around the fate of the soul, judgement and the afterlife.

In translating the Christian concepts of soul and spirit Dupont generally avoided the use of the term *mupashi*, with its resonances of the ancestors and its relational and social character. Instead he used the rich word *mutima* (pl. *mitima*), usually translated into English as 'heart'. *Mutima* is a resonant concept in Bemba language and thought. Another White Father, Father Oger, documented eighty-four different expressions of *mutima* in Bemba proverbs. Badenbarg refers to *mutima* as the equivalent of the Greek 'psyche', while Hinfelaar regards it as a kind of unifying principle uniting body and blood and 'carrying' the *mweo* (life spirit) and the *mupashi* (the spirit of a person's ancestral identity).

At the very beginning of Dupont's Bemba catechism God (rendered as *Mulungu* not *Lesa* as in many Protestant translations) is described as consisting of *mutima* only:

Mulungu kinshi? (What is God?)

Mulungu mutima weka weka (God is spirit only)⁶⁶

The angels were also referred to as *mitima*, and God gave every man *mutima*, which would never die:

Lelo muntu ni nshi? (What is man today?)

Lelo muntu ni kibunbwa kya kwa Mulungu, kyaba na mutima na mubili. (Today man is God's creation with a heart/spirit and body.

Mutima was muntu ulefwa? (Does man's heart/spirit die?)

Ioo, mutima wa muntu taulefwa kibi. (No, man's heart/spirit does not die).⁶⁷

On the very first page of the catechism converts were also introduced to the notion of Heaven, or *mulu*, (meaning literally 'the sky') as the location of God, and a few pages later:

Mulu kinshi (What is heaven?)

Mulu pantu pa kwangala siku pe pamo na Mulungu. (Heaven is the site for playing/living with God forever).⁶⁸

The catechism taught that at death the *mitima* of the righteous would go to *mulu* and that at the end of the world the *mutima* will join again with the body, which will be resurrected:

Mubili ukashyukuka nshi? (How will the body resurrect?)

Mubili ukashyukuka nga ukaingilwa na mutima jila imbi. (The body will resurrect when the spirit enters it again).⁶⁹

The first mention of hell and purgatory came through an explanation of the fate of Adam and Eve, man's 'ancestors'. Having eaten of the forbidden fruit and committed an 'eternal' sin, God chased them to a place where they would have to toil the land, become sick, suffer from evil spirits (*vibanda*) and endure eternal fire. This place was rendered as *Jehennama*, a Swahili term itself drawn from Arabic and ultimately from Hebrew. A person dying having committed a minor sin would go to *motoara*, the Swahili word for purgatory, a place of suffering and atonement for sins.⁷⁰ It is hard to know how far the concepts of hell and purgatory, hammered home in the

catechism and in sermons, ‘caught on’ amongst Catholic converts. Reported imaginings and visions of heaven were, understandably, more frequent than those of hell, and are clearly evident in accounts of African Protestant dreams.⁷¹ Hugo Hinfelaar cites the following women’s song dating from the 1940s or 1950s in which a woman is admonished for leaving her rural home to move to town. Her reply indicates that she knew the difference between a mortal and a venial sin:

‘Mother of Bwalya, you will burn in hell!!
You boarded Thatcher and destroyed your children.’

‘I will not burn but will only pass through Purgatory’.⁷²

One question that appears to have troubled first-generation converts in particular was that of the fate of their non-Christian ancestors and relatives. Slowly, as Christian communities solidified, so the community of the dead would come to coincide more closely with the community of the ancestors, but until this happened there was a stark choice to be made, and the priests were clear about this. Many early converts, like the elderly woman cited earlier, feared that a Christian burial would separate them from the ‘village of the ancestors’ after death. Furthermore, a doctrine that had the potential to consign some of one’s closest kin to eternal suffering was a difficult one to accept in a society in which responsibility for the care of one’s kin extended to their care after death. Caring for the spirits of one’s ancestors was a central duty of kinship.

The good news, of course, was that God had liberated man by sending the Redeemer, his son, Jesus (*Bwana Isa*). In the catechism the verb used for this liberation was that used for the freeing of slaves: *lubulu*. After his death Jesus’ spirit went to *limbo*, a completely new word in ciBemba, but one that serendipitously sounded as if it might be derived from a central

African language. While individuals would be judged on death by God, there would also be a judgement of all people, at the 'end of things', when Jesus returned to the earth.

The catechist (assuming she or he could interpret Dupont's somewhat obscure ciBemba) could be in no doubt, then, of the importance of the link between individual wrongdoing and fate after death. There was further good news, however, in the explanation of grace and redemption. God had given human beings 'grace' (*neema*, a Swahili term). One type of grace was the grace of purity, translated through the word *kubuta*, meaning 'to be white'; the second type of 'grace' was the grace of redemption. Redemption could be obtained through prayer and the sacraments (*nsakramenta*). The sacraments, the catechist recited, 'made visible' God's grace in their hearts. The first sacrament was baptism, or *lubatizo*. As we have seen, the White Fathers were, in their early years in Bemba country, assiduous in their attempts to baptize the dying, particularly infants. This was carefully explicated in the catechism that taught the converted that anyone could baptize a person who was about to die.⁷³ Then there was the tricky question of the meaning of the sacrament of the Eucharist.

Sacrifice and the Afterlife

In her study of '*banyama*', or vampire spirits, and rumours in colonial East and Central Africa, Luise White discusses the periodic accusations of bloodsucking made against White Fathers in this region.⁷⁴ Though the Eucharist was not specifically referred to in these accusations, its symbolism was unquestionably powerful, and made more so by the fact that in the early years of their mission the White Fathers ruled that this sacrament should be received only very rarely by converts, and was strictly tied to confession. Garvey recounts how, in

1908, the Chilubula church council ruled that any Christian guilty of a serious sin would be barred from the Eucharist ‘until the superior of the mission decides to readmit to the sacrament’, and that similar sanctions (though contrary to the legal discipline of the Church) were in force into the 1920s.⁷⁵ Exclusion from the Eucharist, then, was frequently used as a form of church discipline and may have reinforced the view that the white priests were reserving for themselves this most powerful of sacraments. Hinfelaar argues that the symbolism of the Eucharist resonated with the traditional beliefs and practices of women, and that the words used for Christ’s body (*umubili*) and blood (*mulopa*) ‘were similar to the main symbols of traditional religion’ and echoed female concerns around fertility and access to the Divine. Women, according to Hinfelaar, appropriated Catholic teaching on the importance of confession prior to participation in the Eucharist to their own ends, associating the traditional concept of defilement with the injunction to receive the mass in a state of purity. But he also argues that the virtual monopolization of the ritual by celibate priests and young altar boys did not go unnoticed by ordinary women, who saw this exclusiveness as historically continuous with the aristocratic courtly cult of the Bemba ‘Crocodile’ Clan chiefs.⁷⁶ Sacrifice had been central to that chiefly religion, and was particularly evident at the time of a chief’s death. Now this new religion taught that the final sacrifice had been made that rendered all others not only unnecessary, but directly contrary to its teaching. At the level of burial practice, then, Christian missionaries of all persuasions sought to eliminate all remnants of the human and animal sacrifices that had accompanied the deaths of politically and spiritually significant persons. Through their (rare) participation in the Eucharist and their witnessing of the priests’ more regular performance of the rite, converts were reminded that the final sacrifice had been made for them – if only they would first rid themselves of their sins.

‘What is the Eucharist?’ asked the catechism, and, ‘Who has our Lord given power to do the Eucharist?’ The answer to the latter was, of course, the priests. It was the priests who were empowered to sacrifice (*kuleka*, literally to abandon) the body and the blood of Christ manifested in the bread and the wine:

Kukita missa ni kuleka lambo lya mubili na lya mulopa wa Bwana Isa Kristu mu vyamoneka vya mukate na vya divai ku maboko ya patiri. (To conduct mass is to sacrifice the body and the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ manifested in the bread and wine through the hand of the priest).⁷⁷

As Shipton argues for the case of the Luo in Kenya, to make a sacrifice ‘is to make an entrustment that reaches across the bounds between the known and the unknown’ and to connect the present with the past and the future.⁷⁸ But what kind of future and past were Catholic converts being asked to connect to, and what concept of time were they being urged to adopt? Florence Bernault, writing of the colonial period in French Equatorial Africa, argues that two very different concepts of sacrifice were in play there. Whilst the ‘Western’ Christian tradition of sacrifice is imbued with ideas of ‘immolation and destruction’, Equatorial Africans, she argues, imagined sacrifices as part of an exchange economy. Offerings were ‘messengers who carried the community’s demands and respect to the world of the dead’. This was a system of social reproduction based on ‘trading with the other world’. Those who sacrificed ‘ate together’ with the spirits, imbuing their life force, and the human victims of sacrifice ‘could themselves become victims in the process’.⁷⁹ Drawing on the work of Joseph Tonda, Bernault argues that colonial rule and particularly the colonial economy of Equatorial Africa produced a severe dislocation of this symbolic economy of sacrifice.⁸⁰ The colonial economy and its agents demanded unreasonable and unusual

sacrifices – the sacrifice of labour, the renunciation of polygamy and of the spirits of the ancestors. Colonial rulers demanded what Tonda calls ‘free sacrifice’, sacrifices that offered nothing in return. They were, in effect, ‘false ancestors’ feeding from the offerings made, growing fat on the sacrifices of subject peoples.

Elements of this analysis are certainly present in White’s account of the *banyama* rumours in this region and their periodic attachment to the White Fathers. If the White Fathers were sometimes figured as vampires, or the power behind the local vampires, sucking the blood of the people of this part of central Africa, this was certainly not solely, or even primarily, the outcome of their regular performance of a ritual act of sacrifice, potent as this was.⁸¹ As White argues, *banyama* make no sense outside the political economy and labour history of this part of Africa. The White Fathers worked in what effectively became a labour migrant reserve, and though their relations with the British administration were frequently strained and frosty, they were not insignificant actors in the transformation of the local political economy, particularly the extraction of male labour. Yet more significant was their active role, shared with other Christian missionaries, in the slow undermining of chiefly ritual and political authority. In a society in which material and spiritual well-being were so closely associated, the extraction of labour and changes to agricultural practice were not only important in terms of physical health and well-being, but were seen as symptoms of a larger spiritual imbalance and malaise – contributing at times to a perceived crisis of social reproduction. Conversely, any undermining of protective spiritual mechanisms, such as *kupyana*, that rid the living of the polluting effects of death, was likely to be seen as closely connected to, if not a direct cause of, material decline, illness and, of course, death itself. Becoming a Christian in these circumstances was, indeed, an act of enormous faith, for its rewards were to be had in the

afterlife, not in health and well-being and social harmony in this one. This aspect of conventional Christian teaching was also markedly individualistic. Father Labrecque's remark that 'for Africans there is no such thing as remuneration after death' was slightly misleading. African belief systems in this region, as elsewhere, stressed the utmost importance of ensuring that the dead made a smooth transition to the state of ancestorhood, and that once there were kept content. This was a kind of 'reward', if not 'remuneration'. Such a transition was, in some part, dependent on how one had behaved in one's own life – some (like suicides and witches) would probably never make it and would join the ranks of the troublesome, distressed, damaged and damaging bad spirits – the *ciwa* or *vibanda*. But the transition was also critically dependent on how successfully one's family and kin managed the death process. The 'remuneration' for success in this regard was a collective one that linked the past to the present and the future. The living would be able to carry on living, new generations would be born, thanks to the benevolent spiritual presence of past generations, and the land would be fertile and abundant.

By the time of the outbreak of the First World War it must have seemed to many, both Christians and non-Christians, that something had gone badly wrong with the spiritual economy of this region. Labour recruitment to the mining industry to the south now segued into the forced enlistment of men as carriers and soldiers for the war that had broken out between the white men to the north. The death and devastation of the slave trade was within living memory – perhaps it had returned? Famine, a devastating smallpox epidemic and then influenza (that arrived with returning soldiers and carriers) added to a widespread sense that death was winning out over life. In their diaries the White Fathers registered the sense of helplessness and despair as the child population of whole villages succumbed to disease.

It is perhaps unsurprising that so many in this region turned to new religious movements that taught, amongst other things, that the end of the world was imminent and that the price for sin would be paid at a collective as much as at an individual level. Imaginings of death, and life after death, were central to these interpretations of the Christian message. Anticipating apocalypse involved a rethinking of time. Heaven, hell and purgatory were present as destinations after death, but prominence was given to the less individualistic and more collective Last Judgement, to which the new colonial masters would be subject like everyone else. There is a rich and extensive scholarship on these 'alternative' African religious movements in twentieth-century northern Zambia.⁸² This part of the country turned out to be a fertile ground for independent Christian leaders and congregations, largely Protestant in origin. As both Hinfelaar and Karen Fields argue, the heated competition between Protestant and Catholic missionaries in the northern province was in part responsible for this. When the Watchtower movement swept through the region between 1917 and 1918, the White Fathers were prime targets for attack, both spiritual and physical. Protestant missionaries at nearby Lubwa had already prepared the ground by spreading the message that the pope and all his agents were in the pay of Satan. The First World War began to take its toll, along with the creeping effects of the extraction of male labour for consumption by mining capitalism to the south. The vulnerability of the White Fathers in particular must have appeared confirmed when their stations at Kayambi and Chilubula were ransacked by enemy troops. Meanwhile older belief systems and their agents, the chiefs and the ritual specialists, had been fatally disempowered and were ill prepared for these new challenges.

Since conventional versions of Christianity seemed not to have solved the problems of evil, or to have conquered death

as the missionaries had promised, more radical spiritual solutions were needed, ones which returned again to the idea of sacrifice. Watchtower adherents looked forward to a complete remaking of the world with the second coming. Heaven and hell, they were taught, were 'priestly inventions'.⁸³ Death was everyone's destination while awaiting the Day of Judgement when the dead would return to life and the great 'dividing work' would begin.

The end did not come, however, but was endlessly deferred. New movements succeeded Watchtower – the Mchape witchfinding movement of the early 1930s, and the spectacular – and ultimately tragic – revivalist church led by Alice Lenshina in the 1950s. The Catholic Church in Northern Rhodesia was deeply threatened by these mass radical spiritual movements, which were often overtly hostile to its activities. But Catholicism was not without its own, less spectacular and gentler forms of religious revival in the 1950s, revivals which spoke to both the incorporation of the faith into local idioms and practices, and to the simultaneous institutional and political resistance to that incorporation. Marian Year, in 1954, was a focus for the growing popularity in the region of the Legion of Mary. The Marian enthusiasm even reached the inner sanctum of Bemba power. Paramount Chief Chitimukulu not only consecrated Bemba territory to the Virgin, but also placed a copy of Pineau's biography of Bishop Dupont in the sacred graveyard at Mwalule, amongst the 'relics' of deceased Bemba chiefs.⁸⁴ Nearly fifty more years would elapse before the return of Dupont's body to Bemba country, where it would be buried, not in the sacred burial ground of the Bemba chiefs, but at the mission station of Chilubula. Alongside the Marian enthusiasm of the 1950s was another movement that caught the imagination of local Catholics and appeared to resonate with aspects of older ways of thinking. This was the movement devoted to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and it was taken up

enthusiastically by a former seminarian, Emilio Mulolani, born in Ipusukilo in 1921.⁸⁵ Eventually declared heretical by the church authorities, Emilio Mulolani started his own church, in which the symbolism of the sacred heart became that of the *mutima*, that resonant entity that combined body and spirit, and which had stood for the soul in translations of the catechism. More controversially, Mulolani's teaching celebrated love, marital sexuality and the harmony of male and female, and (to the horror of the Catholic authorities and traditional leaders alike) institutionalized nude mixed bathing. For Emilio, as for Lenshina and her followers, the devil was real and present, but also a relic of the shameful nineteenth century past of the Bemba, when so much blood had been shed. Expiation and salvation were available, however, through the drinking of Christ's blood in the Eucharist. After repeated brushes with the traditional authorities, the disbanding of his followers' settlements and periods of detention, Mulolani's movement gradually faded away, though traces of his internalization of Catholic teaching lingered in popular Catholic practice.

Conclusion

Death and its conquest were central to the mission of the White Fathers in what became the northern part of Northern Rhodesia and there was plenty of death around when they arrived in the region in the 1890s. The missionaries confronted a political system that had a death ritual at its heart, and a set of beliefs that linked sexual practice with the correct management of death. This sex/death link was critical to the health and fertility of the land and its people, threatened as they were by the after-effects of the violence of the slave trade and now by the new 'sacrificial' demands of the early colonial

economy. But the sex/death link was a provocative one for Christian missionaries, and breaking that link became one of their aims, alongside the instillation of a more individualized notion of sin and a concept of the afterlife. Conversion was a leap of faith that offered nothing less than the conquest of death. But death continued to stalk the region in the first two decades of colonial rule and many turned to more radical spiritual solutions.

In the next chapter I examine the ways in which the link between sexual practice and the management of death repeatedly surfaced as an issue in the accounts of colonial social anthropologists in this and neighbouring regions in the inter-war period.

ENDNOTES: CHAPTER I

1. Marja Hinfelaar and Giacomo Macola, 'The White Fathers' Archives in Zambia', *History in Africa*, 30 (2003), 439–45.
2. David M. Gordon, *Invisible Agents: Spirits in a Central African History*, New African Histories Series (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2012); major contributions to the history of the White Fathers' mission in Northern Zambia include Brian Garvey, *Bembaland Church: Religious and Social Change in South Central Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 1994); Kevin B. Maxwell, *Bemba Myth and Ritual: The Impact of Literacy on an Oral Culture* (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 1983) and Hugo Hinfelaar, *Bemba-Speaking Women of Zambia in a Century of Religious Change, 1892–1992* (Leiden: Brill, 1994). Hinfelaar is himself a priest of the White Fathers order. Amongst his many predecessors writing on Bemba religious thought and practice was Edouard Labrecque, whose two-volume work produced in the 1930s has been translated and edited as *Beliefs and Religious Practices of the Bemba and Neighbouring Tribes*, trans. by Patrick Boyd (Chinsali, Zambia: Ilondola Language Centre, 1982).

The rich archives of the Société des Missionnaires d'Afrique in Rome, which contain the original parish diaries, are supplemented by the vast additional archives of primary material and secondary material in Lusaka. The British social anthropologist Audrey Richards studied Bemba society in the 1930s. Her papers (housed in the archives of the London School of Economics) are rich in material on Bemba belief systems. Some but not all of this material found its way into her published work; see Henrietta Moore and Megan Vaughan, *Cutting Down Trees: Gender, Nutrition and Agricultural Change in Northern Zambia*

- (London: Heinemann, 1994); Megan Vaughan, “‘Divine Kings’: Sex, Death and Anthropology in Inter-War East-Central Africa”, *Journal of African History*, 49 (2008), 383–401.
3. Marja Hinfelaar, ‘Remembering Bishop Joseph Dupont (1850–1930) in Present-Day Zambia’, *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 33 (2003), 365–76.
 4. This is abundantly clear from the early diaries housed at the White Fathers’ archives in Rome and from the biography of Dupont: Henri Pineau, *Evêque-Roi des Brigands: Monseigneur Dupont* (Paris, 1937). On the White Fathers and the slave trade see Francois Renault, *Lavigerie, l’esclavage Africain et L’Europe*, 2 vols (Paris: E. De Bolard, 1971).
 5. Gordon, *Invisible Agents*, Chapter 2; Andrew Roberts, *A History of the Bemba: Political Growth and Change in North-Eastern Zambia Before 1900* (London: Longman, 1973); Audrey Richards, *Land, Labour and Diet in Northern Rhodesia: An Economic Study of the Bemba Tribe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939); Hinfelaar, *Bemba-Speaking Women*; Vaughan, “‘Divine Kings’”.
 6. See Gordon, *Invisible Agents*, pp. 29–32 for an illuminating analysis of this tradition. As Gordon outlines, there are several written accounts of the ‘origins’ tradition, including a widely cited one by the White Father, Edouard Labrecque. See also Roberts, *History of the Bemba*, pp. 9–11.
 7. Gordon, *Invisible Agents*, p. 34.
 8. For a full discussion see Vaughan, “‘Divine Kings’”. Audrey Richards made an extensive study of chiefly death ritual: London, London School of Economics, Audrey Richards Papers: ‘1/1 Chiefs: Death and Burial’; ‘1/4 Chiefs: Supernatural Powers, *Mipashi* etc.’.
 9. This is particularly emphasized by Hinfelaar, *Bemba-Speaking Women*.
 10. There are a number of accounts of the White Fathers’ entry into the heart of Bemba territory and their relationship with Bemba chiefs. They are drawn from the voluminous

documentation produced by the White Fathers themselves. See especially Garvey, *Bembaland Church*.

11. Garvey notes Dupont's claim that 'I have always been considered as the successor of Mwamba. The queens call me their husband. The children call me their father. All honour me and obey my commands.' Garvey, *Bembaland Church*, p. 57.
12. Hinfelaar, *Bemba-Speaking Women*, p. 37.
13. Garvey, *Bembaland Church*, p. 109.
14. Garvey, *Bembaland Church*, p. 94.
15. Maia Green, *Priests, Witches and Power: Popular Christianity after Mission in Southern Tanzania* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003); Peter Pels, *A Politics of Presence: Contracts Between Missionaries and Waluguru in Late Colonial Tanganyika* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1999); Kathryn Smythe, *Fipa Families: Reproduction and Catholic Evangelization in Nkansi, Ufipa, 1880-1960* (Portsmouth NH: Heinemann, 2006).
16. White Fathers Archives, Maison Généralice, via Aurelia 269, Rome (hereafter WFA), J. Dupont, 'Règlements et Instructions pour les Missionnaires du Nyassa' (copied by Father David Roy, Likuni, 1919). All translations are my own.
17. WFA, Chilubula Mission Diary, January/February 1901.
18. Garvey writes that the Catholic youth came to be known as those who 'collect the dying'. Garvey, *Bembaland Church*, p. 92.
19. WFA, Kilonga Mission Diary, 19 January 1913.
20. WFA, Chilubula Mission Diary, Vol. 2, 13 March 1914.
21. Amongst many examples, WFA, Chilubula Mission Diary, the case of Malaira in September 1917; Ngumbo Mission Diary, a long account of the baptism of an 'old polygamist' on 23 January 1910.
22. WFA, Ipusukilo Mission Diary, February 1922.
23. WFA, Kayambi Mission Diary, December 1895.
24. WFA, Mambwe Mission Diary, 27 January 1896.

25. WFA, Chilubula Mission Diary, 6 February 1916.
26. WFA, Kilonga Mission Diary, January 1902.
27. WFA, Chilubula Mission Diary, 30 June 1907.
28. WFA, Chilubula Mission Diary, 3 November 1910.
29. WFA, Chilubula Mission Diary, 21 November 1910.
30. Pineau, *Evêque-Roi*, p. 54.
31. WFA, Ngumbo Mission Diary, 9–10 February 1910.
32. WFA, Chilubula Mission Diary, 21–22 May 1914.
33. The spectacular case of the Mexican ‘Day of the Dead’ is analysed brilliantly by Claudio Lomnitz-Adler in *Death and the Idea of Mexico* (New York, NY: Zone Books, 2008). George E. Brooks wrote on the celebration of All Souls’ Day in the Luso-African context of Guinea-Bissau at the end of the nineteenth century: George E. Brooks, ‘The Observance of All Souls’ Day in the Guinea-Bissau Region: A Christian Holy Day, An African Harvest Festival, An African New Year’s Celebration, or All of the Above?’, *History in Africa*, 11 (1984), 1–34.
34. WFA, Chilubula Mission Diary, 1 November 1915; 1–2 November 1916.
35. Quoted in Hinfelaar, *Bemba-Speaking Women*, p. 70. According to Hinfelaar, the death of Christ was regarded as the worse possible kind of death – that of a young unmarried man, without offspring, murdered by his own people.
36. Hinfelaar, *Bemba-Speaking Women*, p. 60.
37. Garvey, *Bembaland Church*, p. 75.
38. WFA, Sainte Marie du Luapula Mission Diary, 5 September 1922.
39. WFA, Sainte Marie du Luapula Mission Diary, 23–29 June 1923.
40. Edouard Labrecque, ‘Bemba Customs’ dated 1931, trans. by Father M. Gruffat, Archives of the Missionaries of Africa, Zambia, Lusaka: Section VI, XIV, Last Illness, Death and Burial.

41. Labrecque, 'Bemba Customs', Section XV, The Succession – Kupyana.
42. Edouard Labrecque, 'Bemba Customs', Section II.
43. Labrecque, 'Bemba Customs', Section VI, XIV: Last Illness, Death and Burial.
44. In his study of African culture and the afterlife (focused on West African examples), Kwasi Wiredu comments that there is a 'mildly paradoxical unanimity in African studies about African belief in the afterlife', and this is that those beliefs are generally what he calls 'this worldly'. Kwasi Wiredu, 'Death and the Afterlife in African Culture', in *Person and Community: Ghanaian Philosophical Studies*, ed. by Kwasi Wiredu and Kwame Gyekye (Washington, DC: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1992), p. 137.
45. An African, 'The Religion of My Fathers', *International Review of Missions*, 19 (1930), 362–76. The editor of the journal noted that the author was born around 1884 and was of 'mixed Ngoni–Sena' heritage. David Maxwell kindly directed me to this article.
46. Michael Jindra, writing on the history of mortuary practice in the Cameroon Grassfields, argues that one of the central effects of Christianity in this region was to moderate notions of pollution around death, but also, paradoxically, to expand the realm of the ancestors by according everyone (not just the elite) an afterlife: Michael Jindra, 'Christianity and the Proliferation of Ancestors: Changes in Hierarchy and Mortuary Ritual in the Cameroon Grassfields', *Africa*, 75 (2005) 356–77.
47. In 1932 Bishop Larue commented, in a letter to missionaries, that though the Bemba thinking was full of fear and superstition, they lacked a proper fear of God. He suggested that in their sermons priests should concentrate on issues of death and judgement. Quoted in Garvey, *Bembaland Church*, p. 91.

48. Garvey, *Bembaland Church*, p. 91.
49. Garvey, *Bembaland Church*, p. 91.
50. Jean Delumeau, *Sin and Fear: The Emergence of a Western Guilt Culture, 13th to 18th Centuries*, trans. by Eric Nicholson (New York, NY: St Martin's Press, 1990).
51. Lomnitz's study of the Christianization, politicization and fetishization of death in Mexico is perhaps the most impressive of recent studies of death in the New World, but there is a vast literature on this: Lomnitz, *Death and the Idea of Mexico*. See also Jindra, 'Christianity and the Proliferation of Ancestors'.
52. Among them, Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009), Chapter 5; Isobel Hofmeyr, *The Portable Bunyan: A Transnational History of 'A Pilgrim's Progress'* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); Paul Stuart Landau, *The Realm of the Word: Language, Gender and Christianity in a Southern African Kingdom* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1995); William H. Worger, 'Parsing God: Conversations About the Meaning of Words and Metaphors in Nineteenth-Century Southern Africa', *Journal of African History*, 42 (2001), 417–47; Birgit Meyer, *Translating the Devil: Religion and Modernity among the Ewe of Ghana* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999). The issue of translation has also been addressed by scholars of religion in this region: Hinfelaar, *Bemba-Speaking Women*; Maxwell, *Bemba Myth and Ritual*; Garvey, *Bembaland Church*; Ipenburg, *All Good Men: The Development of Lubwa Mission, Chinsali, Zambia, 1905–1967* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1992).
53. Hugo Hinfelaar has argued that, in relation to the translation of the Devil, these dangers were very real: 'Whatever the cause may have been, the Biblical demons were wrongly translated and the dire consequences of this syncretism would be felt in the following decades.' Hinfelaar, *Bemba-Speaking Women*, p. 48.

54. Meyer, *Translating the Devil*.
55. Quoted in Garvey, *Bembaland Church*, p. 90.
56. J. Dupont, *Catéchisme en langue Kibemba* (Saint Cloud: Imprimerie Belin Frères, 1900). There is a copy in the White Fathers library in Rome. My thanks to Père Juan Oses for locating a copy for me to consult.
57. I draw here on Garvey's discussion of the genesis of the Bemba catechism: Garvey, *Bembaland Church*, pp. 90–91.
58. My thanks to Walima Kalusa who translated the catechism and pointed out instances of incorrect Bemba and use of Mambwe phrases. I am also grateful to Wambui Wa-Ngatho for Swahili translations.
59. Audrey Richards papers: '1/4: Chiefs, Supernatural Powers, *Mipashi* etc.'
60. Richards argued that it was the *chinshingwa* that was removed from the surviving spouse when a married adult died. Only after this could it become a *mupashi*, an ancestral spirit.
61. Hinfelaar, *Bemba-Speaking Women*, p. 48. See also Meyer, *Translating the Devil*.
62. H. Barnes, 'Survival After Death Among the Bemba of North-Eastern Rhodesia', *Man*, 26 (1922), 41–42; Maxwell, *Bemba Myth and Ritual*; Hinfelaar, *Bemba-Speaking Women*. In 1928 the American theologian and former missionary W. C. Willoughby published an extraordinarily thorough and sympathetic summary and analysis of existing findings on African concepts of the soul: W. C. Willoughby, *The Soul of the Bantu: A Sympathetic Study of the Magico-Religious Practices and Beliefs of the Bantu Tribes of Africa* (London: Student Christian Movement, 1928).
63. Robert Badenbug, *The Body, Soul and Spirit Concept of the Bemba of Zambia: Fundamental Characteristics of Being Human of an African Ethnic Group* (Bonn: Verlag, 1999).
64. Badenbug, *Body, Soul and Spirit*, p. 96 and Appendix 8.

65. Gordon argues that while Protestant missionaries tried to build on a local spiritual vocabulary, Catholics, fearing syncretism, tried to build a completely new one. This is only partially true. Whilst some new terms were introduced, Catholics were also faced with the necessity of translation and implicitly, comparison.
66. *Catéchisme en Langue Kibemba*, p. 3. Translated by Walima Kalusa.
67. *Catéchisme en Langue Kibemba*, p. 6.
68. *Catéchisme en Langue Kibemba*, p. 7.
69. *Catéchisme en Langue Kibemba*, p. 6.
70. *Catéchisme en Langue Kibemba*, p. 13.
71. For example, in the 1930s the anthropologist Monica Wilson documented the dreams of Nyakyusa Christians, many of which featured heaven. See Chapter II. Monica and Godfrey Wilson papers, University of Cape Town Library, Manuscripts and Archives Department (BC 880), 'D4.2: Christian Amusements and Dreams'. See also Hofmeyr, *Portable Bunyan*, Chapter 6.
72. Hinfelaar, *Bemba-Speaking Women*, pp. 68–69. 'Thatcher' refers to the bus company Hobson and Thatcher.
73. 'Mapatiri kuti babatize abantu, kabinge nga muntu aswa afwe, bantu bonse kuti bamubatize', *Catéchisme en Langue Kibemba*, p. 24.
74. Luise White, *Speaking with Vampires: Rumor and History in Colonial Africa* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000).
75. Garvey, *Bembaland Church*, pp. 106–07. See also Hinfelaar, *Bemba-Speaking Women*, p. 67.
76. Hinfelaar, *Bemba-Speaking Women*, p. 67.
77. *Catéchisme en Langue Kibemba*, p. 27.
78. Parker Shipton, *The Nature of Entrustment: Intimacy, Exchange and the Sacred in Africa* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 203.

79. Florence Bernault, 'Body, Power and Sacrifice in Equatorial Africa', *Journal of African History*, 47 (2006), 207–39, p. 220.
80. Joseph Tonda, 'Enjeux du deuil et négociation des rapports sociaux de sexe au Congo', *Cahiers d'études africaines*, 157 (2000), pp. 5–24.
81. It should be noted, however, that the intense rivalry that existed between Protestant and Catholic missionaries in this region, and particularly the associations made between the Pope and 'Anti-Christ' certainly helped fuel these allegations.
82. Gordon, *Spiritual Sovereignties*; Hinfelaar, *Bemba-Speaking Women*; Garvey, *Bembaland Church*; Fields, *Revival and Rebellion*; Andrew Roberts, *The Lumpa Church of Alice Lenshina* (Lusaka: Oxford University Press, 1972); Robert Rotberg, 'The Lenshina Movement of Northern Rhodesia', *Rhodes-Livingstone Journal*, 29 (1961), 63–78; Wim M. J. van Binsbergen, *Religious Change in Zambia: Exploratory Studies* (London and Boston, MA: Kegan Paul International, 1981).
83. Fields, *Revival and Rebellion*, p. 96.
84. Garvey, *Bembaland Church*, p. 157.
85. *Ibid.*; Hinfelaar, *Bemba-Speaking Women*, pp. 101–15.

CHAPTER II

Sex, Death and Colonial Anthropologists in the Inter-War Period

Megan Vaughan

As we have seen in Chapter I, the complex and lengthy mortuary rituals of the paramount chief of the Bemba people, the Chitimukulu, attracted the attention of both colonial administrators and anthropologists in Northern Rhodesia.¹ The administrators were concerned with preventing human sacrifice and containing ritualized disorder while attempting to maintain the legitimacy of the traditional hierarchy on which Indirect Rule depended. The anthropologists meanwhile incorporated accounts of the chiefly death ritual into debates on the nature of 'divine kingship' and sovereignty in Africa. The British social anthropologist Audrey Richards contributed to these debates, and to a structural-functionalist reading of the Bemba political system, though she was also careful to point out that there were severe limits to the direct exercise of chiefly power. As a rereading of her fieldnotes indicates, political power resided less in the threat of death than in the promise to create and protect life, particularly (as I have argued in Chapter I) through control over sexuality, and this power was located in the practices of quotidian life.² As we have seen, colonial rule certainly diminished the power of chiefs to make compelling the threat of violence and death, but, more importantly, a combination of economic and social change and the spread of Christianity undermined their ability to control

sexuality and to protect life. To the north, over the border in Tanganyika, the people who had come to be known as the Nyakyusa faced similar issues. Theirs was a decentralized polity, very different to that of the Bemba, but the link between sexuality and death was also strong here. Nyakyusa death practices (as documented by Richards' friends and fellow anthropologists, Godfrey and Monica Wilson) made this link in an explicit way, to the horror of the Moravian and Lutheran missionaries. Here, as in Northern Rhodesia, Christian missionaries attacked local death practices, challenging their converts to choose between 'ways of death'.

Divine Kingship and Death in Lubemba

In 1968 Audrey Richards delivered the Henry Myers Lecture at the Royal Anthropological Institute. The title of her lecture was 'Keeping the King Divine', and in it she drew on her 1930s fieldwork in the north-east of Northern Rhodesia, and her revisit there in 1957, to outline Bemba beliefs in the supernatural powers of their chiefs in relation to the Frazer–Seligman thesis of divine kingship, and to discuss the 'processes by which these beliefs are maintained'.³ Richards had written extensively on the Bemba political system before, and a whole bevy of British anthropologists had joined in with their contributions.⁴ This attention to the Bemba political system can be explained in part by its intrinsic interest to anthropological theories of succession and African political systems more generally, and partly by the problems it posed (and the opportunities it presented) to the engineers of the Indirect Rule system in Northern Rhodesia. British administrators in this part of Africa were generally relieved when they found hierarchical 'traditional' polities in place, but the Bemba polity also posed some challenges to orderly colonial administration. The

structural opposition between the Chief and his councillors was one issue; and the frequent and prolonged succession disputes at the death of a Chitimukulu (and of two or three other major chiefs) was another. When the Chitimukulu died, a game of musical chairs ensued, with incumbents of the other major chieftaincies (Mwamba and Nkula in particular) vying for the top job. Furthermore, after the death of the Chitimukulu there was always an interregnum of a year, institutionalized through a complex and very lengthy death ritual that involved the embalming of the dead chief's body and (within living memory when Richards conducted her research) human sacrifice. So the death of a Chitimukulu was of direct interest to the colonial administration for more than one reason, and it remains of interest to the modern state of Zambia. The Bemba-speaking people form a large and politically significant group within the nation – the election of the Chitimukulu matters to party politics in the age of democratization, as it mattered in the colonial period when urbanized Bemba-speaking peoples played a crucial role in emerging urban politics of the industrial Copperbelt.

Though the structural features of the Bemba political system are undoubtedly fascinating, functionalist descriptions of this system were misleading in some respects, giving the impression of a well-oiled, even bureaucratic system. The secular power of the Chitimukulu had probably always been limited, in part by the physical constraints of the expansive and sparsely populated territory occupied by the Bemba since their arrival in the area in the sixteenth century.⁵ As Richards pointed out in her lecture, Bemba chiefs had no standing armies, and though their secular power, arguably, had been enhanced by colonial rule, in the end their power rested on a 'knife edge', that knife edge being 'their peoples' belief'.⁶ Richards' most important contribution to the literature on the political system of the Bemba came from her examination of

the symbolic mechanisms through which it was maintained. Richards' extensive work on what would now be called something like the materiality of everyday life was critical here, since it was through the everyday practices of agricultural production and village maintenance, as well as through a system of complex rites connected with fertility, that the Chitimukulu exercised his 'supernatural power'.⁷ And 'supernatural power' was the only real power he had once his ability to wage war, take slaves, sacrifice and mutilate had been brought to an end by colonial rule.

Richards' exposition of the workings of this power is lengthy, but she summarized as follows in the lecture. There was 'no single divine ruler' in Lubemba, but the Chitimukulu was acknowledged as the ritual head of the people and chieftainship itself was thought to come from him. Chitimukulu (through his counsellors) was in possession of the Bemba's most sacred relics – those of the first ancestor and first ancestress – and was charged with preserving the memories of dead rulers, ensuring that they were not forgotten and that they were correctly addressed. In justifying her use of the term 'divine king' to describe Chitimukulu, Richards explained that the Chitimukulu exercised his supernatural powers through his mere existence and his person (his 'involuntary' influence) as well as through a series of 'voluntary acts' such as rites he carried out. Under the heading of 'involuntary' influence, Richards included the effects of Chitimukulu's 'health, sickness, anger, sorrow, dreams, misdemeanours or death'.⁸ The 'voluntary' acts included a complex set of rites – economic rites to ensure fertility, sacrifices at shrines, chiefly installation ceremonies and the performance of a series of sex acts with his head wife followed by the lighting of new fires at the capital.⁹ The sex life of the Chitimukulu and the purification rites connected with it were central to the well-being of the entire country, and the same principles applied to the sexual

lives of the chief's subjects. Through these symbolic mechanisms, then, the life and death of the Chitimukulu was connected to the life and death of every subject.

The death of the Chitimukulu was, as Richards put it, a 'disaster'. The land under his rule was said to have 'gone cold', and to have 'broken into pieces'. And, further proof that the Bemba had a 'divine kingship' along Frazer-Seligman lines, Richards provided evidence that the Bemba had strangled their dying chiefs, fearful that if they were left to breathe their last naturally, they would breathe out the *mipashi* or spirits of the land. As she would later put it, 'No myths required, but just the fixed belief that the paramount chief derives his power from the spirits of the dead predecessors and must not be allowed to die with these spirits still in his body'.¹⁰ Throttling a senior chief (this applied not only to Chitimukulu, but also to other senior chiefs of the 'Crocodile' Clan) kept the spirits safe in the chief's body, which was then embalmed and preserved as a 'relic'.¹¹

Richards did not think that regicide was a really central part of Bemba kingship belief. As she commented in her lecture, 'it was never discussed', and this silence (which might be interpreted in various ways) she contrasted with the pleasure and enthusiasm with which people regaled her with accounts of the human sacrifices formerly made at the burial of the Paramount.¹² In fact, as Richards noted when her fieldnotes on the death and burial of chiefs were being archived: 'For strangling see separate notes – NB I was not told of this during my first visit, I didn't ask'.¹³ It was Richards' fellow anthropologist and friend Godfrey Wilson who asked on her behalf when he was carrying out research in the same area in 1938.¹⁴ Wilson had collected similar accounts from the Nyakyusa/Ngonde area of south-west Tanganyika and in 1959 Monica Wilson, his widow, incorporated this material in her own Frazer lecture entitled 'Divine Kings and the Breath of Men'.¹⁵ Richards supplemented Wilson's evidence with accounts from two

colonial administrators with whom she was in regular correspondence – W. V. Brelsford and Thomas Fox-Pitt, though the existence of the practice was denied by her former research assistant, the church minister Paul Mushindo, who described it as ‘just the imagination of the people’.¹⁶ Despite her own admission that regicide was not a central feature of Bemba notions of kingship, Richards continued to collect evidence about it, presumably because of its salience to the continued anthropological debate on ‘divine kingship’ and the importance of African examples to that literature.¹⁷ In 1982, in a letter to Edmund Leach responding to his Frazer Lecture, Richards wrote that although his lecture had been ‘very ingenious and stirring, actual events in Bemba country at the present day back up Frazer more convincingly perhaps...’ and to justify this rather sweeping claim, she described in some detail the procedure for the strangling of senior chiefs:

When he is ill and obviously going to die the hereditary councillors come into the hut and the eldest son of the chief (not an heir in a matrilineal society) remains at the door to watch which gives the signal for the strangling of the dying man. In the case of the last chief who had cancer of the liver (a three- to six-month job usually) he was taken to the small European hospital with the proviso that the hereditary councillors would be allowed to see that he ‘died properly’. I understand that the councillors – about five or six in number – were allowed to come in when the death seemed imminent. I saw in the distance the doctor – serious, bespectacled and of course white coated – and a nurse in pretty uniform and a cap. I was not in the room but heard from the mission driver who had brought the party that councillors thronged round the bed while the Europeans remained aloof. I suppose that coroners in the then Northern Rhodesia had different concepts of their duties than those here.¹⁸

Audrey Richards died herself in 1984, and it is tempting to read this almost Hitchcockian passage as her own late and very retrospective attempt to elevate the Bemba chiefs to 'real' divine kings. The colonial authorities, she implied, turned a blind eye to regicide, and the presence of the 'mission driver' on the scene even hints at some missionary connivance – though this would be rather extraordinary if true.

As Gillian Feely-Harnik noted in her review of the anthropological literature on divine kingship, 'Western scholars devised their ideas about power and prosperity in African politics as they were in the process of incorporating them, often forcibly, into their own'.¹⁹ Feely-Harnik also pointed out that Frazer's original inquiry into the question of why killing should be required to sustain life had originally included a reflection on the 'irrationality and violence underlying the smooth surface of Christian ideals of progress...', but that in later editions of *The Golden Bough* he dropped all reference to Christ's crucifixion. By the time of the 1922 edition, the focus of discussion of divine kingship had come to centre on African examples.²⁰ Even if we might suspect that Richards, later in life, tailored her analysis of the Bemba polity to fit a current academic interest, she can certainly not be accused of wholly 'inventing' the supernatural dimension of chiefly power in Lubemba. The occasion of the death of the Chitimukulu provided an explicit and very performative exposition of the nature of that power.

Three Deaths in Lubemba

The Death of Chitimukulu

When the Paramount Chief Chitimukulu died, the land of the Bemba entered into a kind of 'state of emergency'.²¹ Though Richards herself never witnessed the complex mortuary rites

associated with the death of a Chitimukulu, she collected a large amount of information about it, constructing a kind of composite account.²² After her death, Piers Vitebsky produced a description and analysis based on these extensive notes and there are other accounts, published and unpublished, of the burials of individual Chitimukulus.²³ There is only space here to give a very abbreviated version of the complex set of events that made up the chief's burial.

As we have seen, the Chitimukulu was not allowed to die naturally, but was strangled by senior councillors before he breathed his last, with a view to keeping the spirits of the ancestors inside the body. At the death of the Chitimukulu the land was said to have 'broken up' and gone 'cold'. These English phrases hardly convey the sense of total disaster which Bemba subjects were expected to feel on this occasion. The central idea, according to Richards and Vitebsky, 'seems to be a loss of contact and control over the land: access to the spirits of the land is blocked, since only a living Chief has this access. Hence there is a suspension during the interregnum of all regular rites related to the land. The land has become inaccessible, *kuloba*'.²⁴ The announcement of the Chitimukulu's death was made to other chiefs and at dawn, the sacrifice victims were arrested (though not killed immediately). The list of these victims varies a little from source to source but most agree that there were ten of them, including the Chief's head wife.²⁵ As Paul Mushindo put it in his 1934 account:

In the past when Citimukulu [*sic*] died, his favourites (*ababile*) were killed in order that they accompany him into the new world... These *ababile* who were killed did not include the Chief's children, but were former slaves redeemed by the chief, war captives and people 'sold' by others as serfs to the chief. Those who fattened themselves at the Chief's expense and partook of the choicest morsels! ... In life the chief paid

special attention ensuring that these ten people were well looked after and cared for, because he knew that they were his comrades-in-death.²⁶

Mushindo's explanation, which emphasized the logic of a certain kind of slave society, was only a partial explanation, as Richards was well aware. The list of ten 'sacrifice victims' was not a complete one. In addition to these ten 'compulsory victims', some accounts spoke of the taking (more randomly) of additional victims along the route of the burial procession. And finally, the ritual leader, the Shimwalule, whose job it was to finally bury the Chitimukulu, was himself killed (or possibly committed suicide) once his task was over.²⁷

The interregnum lasted from the announcement of the Chitimukulu's death until the accession of his successor, and was marked by an initial period of anarchy, followed by a period of 'structured marginality', as Vitebsky puts it, with an interim government formed by Regents and overseen by Councillors. Meanwhile the body of the Chitimukulu was placed under the control of a set of officials known as *bafingo* or Undertakers, including embalmers and pall-bearers. The Chief's body was taken to the hut of his head-wife and placed on a raised platform, wrapped in a cloth. Over the following year or so the body was regularly bathed in a specially prepared embalming fluid, until completely desiccated (and likened to a 'seed').²⁸ Eventually the body was transported in a procession from the Chitimukulu's headquarters, across the river Chambeshi, to the burial ground at Mwalule, which housed all the relics of previous Chitimukulus (and other chiefs of the ruling clan) and was presided over by the Shimwalule. The procession took about four days and included prescribed stopping-off points. The human sacrifices were made at specific points along the route, and institutionalized battles took place as the body was handed from one group of officials to another. Finally, having

crossed the Chambeshi River, the procession reached the burial ground at Mwalule, where the first Chitimukulu's remains were buried. Events within the sacred burial ground are reported second-hand, since outsiders were prohibited entry, and this included colonial officials like W. Vernon Brelsford, on whose reports Richards (and hence Vitebsky) relied heavily. According to other accounts collected by Richards, buried alive with the Chief's body were his head-wife, at least one other woman and possibly two boys. Then followed a series of purification rites (including a sexual rite), and a rite of inheritance anointing the Regent and the death of the Shimwalule. The cycle of death now complete, normal time could resume and regeneration of the land and people begin.

It is not difficult to see why the burial of Chitimukulu attracted so much attention from colonial administrators and anthropologists alike. The rich symbolism speaks clearly of the relationship between death and regeneration, of violence and fertility, and of the connection between ritual and political power. One of the most obvious political functions of the burial rites was to re-state the importance of the dominant 'Crocodile' Clan, founders of the Bemba paramountcy, going back to the first remembered Chitimukulu, but the burial rites of the Chitimukulu also 'staged' the structural opposition between various elements in the Bemba polity: between the Chief and his councillors, for example. In other words, the burial rites of the Chitimukulu were a gift to structural-functionalism. For Malinowski, with whom Richards had studied, the rituals of death, like other rites, served a basic function of reinforcing group solidarity, leading inquiry 'away from the corpse and back to the problem of death for society'.²⁹ The Chitimukulu burial rites certainly lent themselves to analysis in these terms.

The British administrators of Northern Rhodesia were well aware of the significance of the death of a Chitimukulu, and indeed of other major Bemba chiefs whose burial rites took a

similar form. The prolonged succession disputes that followed the death of the Chitimukulu (and of the other major chiefs) were an administrative headache. The colonial administrator Brelsford, who was a keen amateur ethnographer, explained that there were administrative as well as anthropological interests at stake: 'the typical movement of chiefs from one district to another on succession is a factor that affects the work of officials of many departments. So [...] though the subject may make dull reading its importance to Government justifies a detailed study'.³⁰ It is possible that the structural features of the Bemba polity had always made succession disputes likely.³¹ Certainly in the colonial period lengthy disputes were the norm, due in part to the material advantages accorded to chiefs by Indirect Rule structures. The frequent interference of the colonial administration probably didn't help. Another anthropologist, Max Gluckman, drew attention to what he thought would be the likely results of this interference in an article published in 1954.³² In the inter-war period a number of Bemba chiefly successions generated large amounts of administrative documentation, as evidenced by voluminous correspondence in the archives. Amongst these were the Chitimukulu succession dispute of 1924 and the Nkula succession of 1937,³³ and – most notably – the Chitimukulu succession of 1944, which resulted in a Commission of Enquiry.³⁴

Colonial administrators, thanks to individuals such as Brelsford and a wide reading of Richards' works, were also aware of the close relationship between the performance of ritual and the political authority of Bemba chiefs. By the later 1930s the Bemba had become an 'anthropological object' of some significance, as well as being a very important political grouping, whose role in the urban politics of the Copperbelt was of immediate concern.³⁵ As elsewhere in British-ruled Africa in the inter-war period, Indirect Rule required that administrators pay lip service, at least, to the authority of

chiefs and to the maintenance of 'custom'. As elsewhere, this policy was fraught with contradictions and ironies.³⁶ The liberal 'civilizing' strand of colonial thinking drew a shaky line at customs deemed 'repugnant'. Whilst there were endless discussions and disputes over whether such practices as polygyny and child betrothal were 'repugnant', human sacrifice (and mutilation) fell rather squarely within this category for anyone with liberal sensibilities.

The last human sacrifices associated with the burial of a Chitimukulu were said to have taken place in 1911. Colonial officials and their African emissaries continued to accompany the burial processions to enforce the ban on sacrifice and to try to maintain order during this period of institutionalized 'disorder'. But they apparently kept a respectful distance when they arrived at the sacred burial ground at Mwalule and therefore in principle could not be completely certain that sacrifices did not take place at the last stage of burial. It is not entirely clear why colonial administrators refrained from entering the burial ground, but it was probably due a combination of considerations. On the one hand, they were probably anxious that this would be a breach too far, likely to create dissension. On the other hand, it was also in their interest to contribute to the maintenance of some residual 'mystique' in relation to the death of the Chitimukulu. It is not surprising then that stories circulated on the ghastly fates that had befallen white men who had been so foolish as to enter the burial ground (even inadvertently) and that Vernon Brelsford repeated these stories himself in 1939.³⁷ He stayed outside the perimeter fence when he accompanied the procession in 1944.³⁸

Once the threat of human sacrifice had apparently receded, the colonial administration represented itself as exercising a kind of schoolmasterly authority, geared toward avoiding 'disorder' of various kinds. In 1938 an African government

messenger was sent to monitor the burial of Chief Nkula, a senior chief of the Bemba whose body was also buried at the Mwalule burial ground. In all likelihood his account exaggerated his own impact on the event, but it is a good indication nevertheless of the nature of colonial (and missionary) presence at the death of a senior chief:

It was on Monday 8th when the DC Chinsali sent me to Nkula's village. I went to Mano (Nkula's old place). There I told the chief Chikwanda that it was now time to take Chief Nkula to be buried, and that all the chiefs should gather together, and that I was sent to see that the people should not make quarrel or fight, and if something happens I should report it to the DC Chinsali. The Chief Chikwanda thanked the DC very much for sending me (Chitwamali) to him and look after the people ... On Wednesday I and the Chikwanda went to Mukukamfumu's village, next morning the DC arrived at Mukukamfumu's. I had been asked by the DC if all the chiefs had come and replied that there [was] only one chief Chikwanda, that other chiefs had not yet come. Chief Chikwanda came to see the DC and thanked him for sending me (Chitwamali) to accompany the body of the chief. On Saturday I came to Nkula's village. When I came in the village I found that many people were in the village singing 'Songa' and playing about. I used to go in group to see if they were causing any troubles, but found that there were no troubles in them. On Sunday Dr D. M. Brown of Lubwa came to bless the chief, all people were gathered together when the Doctor to the chief's body, go in peace, after this the Doctor went back to Lubwa ... [then describes procession to Shimwalule's] Chief Shimwalule welcomed the chief and said that the chief would rest on Friday 19th, there were many men doing a lot of dance, no trouble were noticed. On Saturday 20th the chief was buried, on Sunday people went away to their homes.³⁹

There are other similar accounts of government surveillance of chiefly burial rites from this period, amongst them those of Thomas Fox-Pitt. Fox-Pitt was a district officer of liberal leanings who became an outspoken critic of the colonial administration for which he worked, and later a member of the Movement for Colonial Freedom. In his (frequently scurrilous) letters to Audrey Richards after she had left Northern Rhodesia, he kept her in touch with local events, including succession disputes. Fox-Pitt was deeply critical of what he saw as the cynicism of Indirect Rule and so was keen to draw Richards' attention to its more absurd aspects. In August 1936, for example, Fox-Pitt wrote that Chief Matipa had died and that Chief Kopa had written to him to say that he would be buried in November. This was extremely hasty by Bemba chiefly standards, so Fox-Pitt had enquired, 'Why this urgency?', to which Kopa had replied that, 'It was the wish of the Bwana at Luwingu Boma that he be buried quickly.' Kopa, he noted, was 'a little vexed at this, but only a little' and perhaps quite pleased 'as it must take off the dignity of Matipa to be buried without the traditional period in a hut built in a tree'. Fox-Pitt decided to intervene, using Richards and the pursuit of anthropological knowledge as a pretext:

I will write to Raustane (DC Luwingu) and tell him that an account of the double funeral according to strict native custom would be very valuable to science and the Empire. He is a pompous ass, and will probably be flattered (particularly if the Empire is mentioned). He may write you an account full of long words. He may even allow native custom to function normally. The whole story may be wrong or a misunderstanding – or is it the new enthusiasm for hygiene in villages that drives him on.⁴⁰

Though it is clear that the colonial administration interfered with the mortuary rites of Bemba chiefs, they did so in typically

British style – that is, whilst purporting to have the highest regard for ‘tradition’. But this did not mean that they left ‘death’ untouched, far from it. In order to understand this, I turn to two other deaths recorded by Richards, neither of which was published, but which can be read alongside the account of the death of the Chitimukulu.

A Woman Dies in Childbirth

At dawn on 2 April 1933, a young woman died in Chitikafula’s village in the north-eastern region of Northern Rhodesia. Chitikafula was no ordinary headman – he was one of the royal ‘embalmers’.⁴¹ The day before the woman died she had given birth to a stillborn baby.⁴² Audrey Richards happened to be staying in the village at the time. Chitikafula summoned Richards at 11 a.m. to tell her that the woman was soon to be buried – would she like to attend? Perhaps Chitikafula knew that anthropologists were interested in mortuary rites, or perhaps he just wanted to teach Richards a moral lesson. The headman told her that the woman had died *ncentu* – that is, that her unfaithfulness to her husband had caused her own death and that of her child. They knew this because she had herself died *after* giving birth and because she had not confessed. If she had confessed they could have given her medicine and she could have been saved. But no, she was too afraid of her husband to confess and now she was dead. Perhaps (wrote Richards in her notes to herself), she had not confessed because she ‘didn’t do it’? But this was hardly an appropriate suggestion in the circumstances, and we can assume that Richards did not voice it.

At the shelter men and women were grouped separately and made space for Richards to sit down. The corpse was tied up in a mat and lying on its side. Because the woman had died

ncentu she was to be buried at a crossroads away from the village. The corpse was lifted onto an improvised bier, and the men set off at a run. There was not supposed to be any wailing for such a death, but an old woman did wail and threw herself under the bier. They stopped twice on the way to the crossroads and at each stop the dead woman's husband, who was a Roman Catholic, said a prayer and marked a tree with a cross. The men dug the grave with an apparent 'feeling of unconcern, a job to be done'. At the grave the women 'were upset'. There was some muttering from the woman's family, criticism of the husband. Richards noted, to herself, that this might have been the result of antagonistic 'kinship feeling', or maybe just because 'he really was very stupid'. The body was laid flat in the grave ('we learnt that from the white man'). The woman's five-year-old daughter was told to look into the grave. She cried. Her father told her to throw clods of earth in, which she did, and the women did the same. The grave was covered over and they walked back to the village.

The burial of the woman (whom Richards does not name) who had died *ncentu* was intended as a kind of non-event. It was a death without regeneration: a birth had ended in two deaths. Hers was the worst kind of death, and the woman herself was to blame – not because of her supposed adultery, but because she had not cleansed herself of that transgression and she had not confessed. Richards, very much a 'stiff upper lip' kind of anthropologist, recorded it all with as much objectivity as she could muster, but she was clearly a bit rattled, perhaps even angered, by this death, muttering to herself in her notes. People were 'upset' – the women were 'upset', the little girl was 'upset', the husband was 'very stupid'. There was a body and raw grief, but the wailing was suppressed. There was none of the complex symbolization that marked even a normal commoner's death amongst Bemba-speaking people in the inter-war period,⁴³ let alone that of a chief, and though

Richards notes that Christian prayers were said, she does not seem to have regarded them as filling the terrible gap left by the absence of the normal actions and utterances.

Yet, of course, this was anything but a non-event. By not burying the corpse according to usual custom, by apparently relegating it to a non-place outside the symbolic order, the body and the death itself were imbued with meaning. The woman's behaviour (not her alleged adultery, but her refusal to confess) had placed her outside the protection of society. Although the lesson that Richards (and indeed everyone else) was supposed to take away from this death was clear enough, it could also be argued that this was a death that marked the limits of social and political power.⁴⁴ According to both Richards and her missionary counterparts, much Bemba social and ritual practice was geared toward preventing just this kind of death – regulating sexuality, preserving fertility, ensuring the safe delivery of babies and their survival into adulthood. It had all failed. Faced with the reality of impotence in the face of death, the people of Chitikafula's village responded, or were instructed to respond, with a hollow kind of defiance signalled in a refusal to mourn, and with the accusation that the woman had brought it all upon herself.

The Death of Chanda – Government Messenger

In June 1931 Richards had recorded the course of the death of another commoner in her notebook.⁴⁵ This was not a case of an emblematically 'transgressive' death, such as that of the woman who had died in childbirth at Chitikafula's village. But it was, nevertheless, a death that clearly caused Richards some discomfort.

A man named Chanda was dying in a village in the Chinsali district. He was an ex-government messenger, 'intelligent and

promoted above his fellows on the staff', generally thought to be rather 'above himself' and not very well liked. Richards noted that he had a rather querulous manner, and also that he had no children of his own. At the Lubwa mission hospital (Church of Scotland) he had been examined by Dr Brown and diagnosed with lung cancer.⁴⁶ Chanda had previously consulted a local healer (*nganga*) who had given him medicine, but Brown had scolded him for this. Richards watched over the coming three weeks as Chanda became weaker and sicker. He kept saying that he wanted medicine to make him well. The mission doctors had drained liquid from his chest, but later, when his feet swelled, they sent him home without treatment. Chanda came back saying that the *Bwanas* understood chests but not feet. Richards talked to Chanda and his wife and asked why they had not consulted an *nganga* again. This question met with a 'burst of indignation' from the couple, who pointed out to her that Dr Brown had already told them off once for this. Richards offered to get 'permission from Munday' (another church minister) for them to get the *nganga*. They 'gladly accepted' this offer. Richards came back the next day with the 'permission' but found that medicine had already been brought from the next village and Chandamali had arrived with meat. Since these are Richards' notes to herself, she does not explain the identity of Chandamali, but this can be gleaned from other parts of her archive and from an article by Brelsford. Chandamali was both a former 'head messenger' at Chinsali Boma, but he had also had an abbreviated career as the Shimwalule, the highest ritual authority.⁴⁷ He could therefore be said to have embodied both the old and the new forms of power at work in Lubemba – he was certainly well acquainted with both systems and their interaction. Richards noted that Chandamali was angry and said to her that maybe the man could be saved, but he doubted it: 'It's all the fault of you *Bwanas*. No one is afraid; they will kill anyone now with

witchcraft ... A man who wastes slowly is one attacked by his enemies. If the DC were to call up the messengers and say, "Unless Chanda is well tomorrow you shall each have ten," then he would be walking tomorrow.'

Two days later a man named Chisonde arrived to throw bones. The cause of illness was on the woman's side, he said. Richards' informants agreed. Everyone knew that Chanda's wife had had twins by another husband and had not done the 'purification ceremony' at his death. Why? 'Because the Bwanas stop this ceremony.' She had had a child with Chanda, but it had died.

Chanda died a few days later. The funeral included a few Roman Catholic prayers and 'the Boma messengers were paraded'. Chandamali could not attend 'as he had been a Shimwalule'.⁴⁸ Chandamali, Richards noted, was very 'anti-Christian', and some of this animosity, she implied, was directed at herself. After it was all over, Richards made a note of the three reasons that had been advanced for Chanda's death. They were:

- an illness which could be cured by *muti* but the Bwanas won't allow it
- witchcraft – the Bwanas allow it
- neglect of carrying out ceremonial purification – the Bwanas' teaching⁴⁹

Whichever explanation you chose, the 'Bwanas', in one form or another, were ultimately responsible.

While for the anthropologist the death rites of Chitimukulu spoke to the theory of 'divine kingship' – or at least to the workings of a 'system' in which political and spiritual power were inseparable – the two other deaths outlined here speak to the workings of that 'system' in ordinary lives and to the effects of colonialism and Christianity.

It is very possible that Richards exaggerated the extent of the supernatural power held by Chitimukulu and by other senior chiefs, and which she saw as binding the Bemba people together (albeit on a 'knife edge', as she described it).⁵⁰ This exaggeration was due in part to Richards' structural-functionalist training, and to the fact that she spent much of her time (but certainly not all of it) in the villages of important chiefs.⁵¹ Neither of the two deaths of commoners described here were 'ordinary' since both involved the intervention of a senior ritual authority – a 'royal embalmer' in one case and an ex-Shimwalule, or royal burier, in the other. These two figures were almost bound to put across the 'official line'. Nevertheless, what these deaths and their interpretation have to say is significant. Both point to the importance, at the level of individual lives, of the links between sexuality, authority and death, even in the face of the spread of both Catholic and Protestant versions of Christianity.

Sex and the 'Shades' in South-west Tanganyika

Audrey Richards eschewed a psychoanalytic interpretation of her material. In contrast, her friend Godfrey Wilson, who had worked amongst the neighbouring Nyakyusa/Ngonde peoples in south-west Tanganyika, was more directly influenced by Freudian thinking and more inclined also to stress the *emotional* tenor of ritual, as well as its symbolic content.

Godfrey Wilson, like Richards, had been trained in London by Bronislaw Malinowski, whose study of the Trobriand Islanders, entitled *The Sexual Life of Savages*, had caused something of a stir when it was published in 1929.⁵² Monica Wilson (formerly Monica Hunter) was the daughter of missionaries and had been born and brought up in South Africa before moving to Cambridge, where she had studied history

and anthropology. She had already published a major monograph on the Pondo people of South Africa and their responses to colonialism, when she joined Godfrey in his field site in Tukuyu, south-west Tanganyika, in 1935.⁵³ The fertile rolling hills, with glimpses of a distant Lake Nyasa, made this in many ways an idyllic setting, and Monica wrote home to her parents enthusiastically about the landscape, the flowers and the people, whose exposure to colonial capitalism and to Christianity had come much later than it had for the Bemba. In some ways appearances were deceptive. When carriers from Northern Rhodesia had been coerced into serving for the British forces in the First World War, it was here, in this region, that many had died in desperate circumstances. But it was not only those serving in European armies who died in this war. In an area normally rich in grains and cattle, the local people had been starved out by successive waves of British and German troops. When the war and famine finally ended, the epidemics began: first smallpox and then influenza. Perhaps a tenth of the population died, maybe more. Then in 1919 came a serious earthquake. When the anthropologist Jim Ellison carried out research in the area in the 1990s, the people recalled this period and told him that they had a word in kiNyakyusa which summed up this period of generalized plague: *ikigwaja*.⁵⁴

Godfrey Wilson made little mention of this recent past of death and destruction as he set about researching Nyakyusa ritual and belief systems. Death, however, featured centrally in his ethnographic descriptions and his analysis. Whether this reflected his subjects' preoccupation with death, or his own immersion in the subject is hard to tell, but Nyakyusa death rituals certainly lent themselves to Wilson's symbolic analysis. Though Wilson published one account of Nyakyusa death rituals and a related article on the 'moral system' of the Nyakyusa, much of his extensive research on death was only

published by his wife after his death by suicide in 1944.⁵⁵ Though Monica Wilson faithfully synthesized and reproduced Godfrey Wilson's findings, her account (perhaps inevitably) toned down the palpable sense of excitement conveyed in his fieldnotes and letters as (in his own words) he 'peeled away the skins of the onion' of the death ritual and deciphered its connections with other rites of passage. Wilson's analysis was undoubtedly a structural-functionalist one, and he followed Radcliffe-Brown in arguing that no one ritual made sense in isolation, but needed to be understood as part of a 'cycle'. But, unusually for his generation of social anthropologists, he also stressed the emotional tenor and content of burial rites as expressed through their symbolism:

The emotional aspect of life is not always treated, in monographs of social anthropology, with the same thoroughness and system as are the practical and intellectual aspects; and yet symbols, overt expressions of feeling, are no less essential ingredients of human relationship than actions and concepts. They are no less material and objective.⁵⁶

Wilson observed that Nyakyusa burials were extremely 'lively' affairs. 'Why is it,' he asked, 'that among the English it is most unusual at a burial for a man to turn from greeting the mourners to dancing and flirting with bystanders, and yet among the Nyakyusa it is perfectly normal to do so?'⁵⁷ In his extensive notes on Nyakyusa burials, Wilson documented the close association between death and reproduction, death and sexuality, and the 'passionate anger' aroused by grief. Underlying all of this was, he argued, an equally 'lively' belief in the survival of the dead as 'shades' or ancestors, whose interventions in the realm of the living had to be both acknowledged and managed. This was not 'ancestor worship' (though missionaries often interpreted it as such) but something

a great deal more complex and ambivalent. In particular, Wilson stressed the *fear* aroused by death amongst Nyakyusa. Meanwhile Monica Wilson, working amongst the small but growing community of Nyakyusa Christians, attempted to gauge the extent to which Christians felt empowered to eschew 'pagan' ritual, run the risk of angering the ancestors and assert a new relationship with death.

The 'traditional' Nyakyusa funerary rites studied by Godfrey Wilson took place over three or four days and were divided into two stages: the burial itself (on the day of the death or the next day) and the 'farewell to the dead' and rites of purification. If witchcraft was suspected, the burial was preceded by an autopsy. Wilson was present on a couple of such occasions, noting that it was not easy to gain access to them. Under colonial rule the imputation of witchcraft and sorcery were punishable offences. In one case the body of an adult woman was dissected by a female 'doctor', revealing a large mass in the lower abdomen, which was then displayed to the village headmen and other male elders who interpreted it as evidence of sorcery. Wilson's description of this event makes it clear that the performance of the autopsy was regarded as a very disagreeable but necessary duty, requiring courage and strength on the part of the 'doctor'. In the second case, that of a small child, a black mass was interpreted as a 'binding' or 'disease of the ropes'. The 'ropes' in this case were those of the child's father who had become insane and who had had to be bound with restraining ropes.⁵⁸ Insanity featured prominently in Nyakyusa death rituals and beliefs. Wilson had initially been 'puzzled' by the symbolic eating of excrement that featured in the funerary rites, but later came to understand it as mimicking the action of the insane person, whose madness had been caused by neglect of the cleansing rituals following death.⁵⁹ In the case of the small child, then, the effects of the neglect of ritual had come full circle and produced another

death. Amongst the most important and powerful rites that *had* to be performed after the death of an adult were those of sexual purification. In this regard Nyakyusa and Bemba beliefs were not dissimilar.

Sex featured in Nyakyusa death rituals at a number of different levels. But sex and the dead were also closely connected outside of the ritual context. Wilson was excited to discover from his male informants that the dead were very much present in the act of marital sexual intercourse. Delighted by the apparent unity of Nyakyusa thinking and its method of dealing with what he thought of as universal neuroses, Wilson remarked to his wife, 'The Freudian, I fear, will have a romp with all of this!'⁶⁰ As he had noted in his early paper on 'Nyakyusa Burial Conventions', the focus of Nyakyusa burial rites shifted in the course of the three or four days of their duration from the wailing of the women, to the vigorous displays of dancing men. Though appearing somewhat incongruous to the Anglican Englishman raised to express grief through restraint and solemnity, Wilson's informants explained to him that the lively physicality and sexuality of the 'war dance' (which had in earlier times frequently ended in violence) was an expression of grief. This was the 'passionate anger' that made grief tolerable. 'We dance because there is war in our hearts – a passion of grief and fear exasperates us.'⁶¹ As, on the second or third day, the war dance shifted to a more explicit expression of sexuality, so one of the social objects of the rites was achieved – to turn the thoughts of the living again to 'life and laughter'.⁶² Protecting the bereaved from the contagion of death and ensuring their continued fertility (and that of the land) were the central concerns of the purification rites that followed the burial. To achieve this, first the corpse had to be buried correctly, to allow the spirit to separate from it. Then followed a dangerous process through which the 'shade' or spirit of the deceased was removed from the bodies

of the surviving spouse and close relatives. Once this had been accomplished the transformed spirit could be welcomed back into the family, the family hearth and marital bed. Such a succession of 'stages' of separation is common across many cultures of death and mourning, but the Nyakyusa were particularly explicit about the identification of sex and death. As among the Bemba-speaking people, so also in the Nyakyusa communities studied by Wilson the surviving spouse (or spouses in the case of women in polygamous marriages) needed to have the spirit of their partner removed through the act of sexual intercourse with a relative of the deceased. Neglecting to perform this rite was courting madness, and even death. Furthermore, it would have repercussions, not only on the individual, but also on their living and future children, future sexual partners and close relatives. As Richards had noted for the Bemba, feelings of guilt were widespread. It was possible to do terrible harm to others quite unconsciously. But one had a duty to avoid causing harm through *carelessness* and disregard for ritual.

Performing the rites that constituted a 'farewell to the dead' did not, however, mark the end of intimacy with the spirits of the deceased. Wilson described powerfully the deep ambivalence felt by his informants in relation to the continued involvement of the spirits in their daily lives. That such involvement was unavoidable is apparent from Wilson's account of his conversations with his closest interlocutors, amongst them the ritual expert Kasitile and 'old' Mwandini. In a 'man-to-man' discussion about sex, Mwandini explained to Wilson that the male erection was dependent on the support of the spirit of the founding ancestor Kyela, and that at the moment of ejaculation this spirit was 'driven away'.⁶³ Wilson learned that 'the shade and the semen are brothers', that the shades produced sexual desire in men and menstruation in women. 'I am pretty sure,' he wrote to his wife, 'that the spirits

come into the body at *every* sexual intercourse, cause the penis to erect and the loins of the woman to get hot and that the man's ejaculation drives them away again,' though he added that, 'This has yet to be proved!'⁶⁴ Wilson appeared envious and admiring of Nyakyusa beliefs in this regard: 'You see, Nyakyusa salvation, as far as a relationship with the spirits is concerned, is largely a matter of satisfactory intercourse, while impotence and neurotic perversions are their hell ... a theory that is a good deal nearer to the truth than our grandparents' fire and brimstone'.⁶⁵

But if the spirits were necessarily present in any healthy adult life, this did not mean that they were always completely welcome. Indeed, to be *too* close to the spirits was a fearful thing, and much effort was expended on keeping a healthy distance from them. Wilson saw here a clear difference between Nyakyusa spiritual beliefs and his own Christian ones. The 'whole effort' of 'pagan' spiritual life, he argued, was directed at breaking the 'divine bond' when it became too strong and to 're-establish it in a looser and more healthy form'. Of course, the spirits could never be 'finally dealt with'. They were always likely to come back to one's body and set about brooding again, but ideally they would not come to rest for too long.

Wilson, it appears, had himself inadvertently induced such an unwelcome brooding in his closest informant, Kasitile, and this was a brooding with a distinct political and historical dimension. Kasitile, a ritual specialist himself, had been complaining of being unwell (Wilson suspected that he was suffering from tuberculosis). He seemed unsettled and depressed and finally confessed to Wilson the cause of his troubles. The spirit of Kasitile's father, seeing the close emotional ties that had developed between his son and a white man, was unhappy. In his own life he had never met a white man – he had apparently been fearful of Europeans and had

avoided them. After his death German officers had ordered the felling of the most sacred trees in Kasitile's father's grove, confirming the spirit's dislike of white men. Kasitile, though close to Wilson, felt his father's anxiety. His solution was to take Wilson into the sacred grove at night, to introduce him to his father's spirit. In the long prayer that constituted the 'introduction' Kasitile confessed to fears of his own. Addressing the spirits he said of Wilson, 'Sometimes I want to take him to my heart and then I see his white skin and tremble lest he bind me!' The 'introduction' effected, the fears were put to rest and Wilson felt a new level of acceptance.⁶⁶

Monica Wilson argued that one of the major attractions of Christianity to Nyakyusa converts was, indeed, its promise to rid them of the fear that surrounded death at so many different levels: the fear of pollution, the fear of the consequences of not performing the funeral rites correctly and the fear of angering the 'shades'. That Christian beliefs were having some effect in this regard is evidenced by the reported grumbling of older men that the young were no longer as fearful as they had been. As in Northern Rhodesia, the Christian missionaries in south-west Tanganyika (predominantly from the Moravian Church and the Berlin Mission) combined their message of hope and the enticements of heaven with punishments to those who wavered and potent visions of hell and damnation. Monica Wilson, a committed Christian from a Church of Scotland missionary family, was unnerved by the constant references to death and damnation in church sermons, and deeply shocked by the physical punishments sometimes meted out by some of the German missionaries. Sunday sermons were suffused with images of hell and services punctuated by denouncements of converts who had gone astray. In her notes Monica Wilson referred to these as 'fire insurance' sermons, and she recorded a number of them delivered by both European missionaries and Nyakyusa preachers. Many emphasized the

fragility of Christian belief and the need for constant vigilance 'in our hearts' against ever-present evil. God, they were told, would not be deceived on the day of judgement:

We go out and reach in the villages and we say to ourselves, and to those who hear us, that we are Christians ... yet in our hearts we are evil. Our hearts are brimming with evil things. Maybe when we stand in front of God he will say, 'I did not see you. Depart into hell.'⁶⁷

At the largest Moravian mission station, Rungwe, the German missionary Marx preached on the theme of 'many are called, but few are chosen'. Throughout the long service (which included the blessing of a sinner in the congregation), the theme of 'falling off' was reiterated. A letter was read from Lazarus, an elder of the church in another mission station. Lazarus reproached the Rungwe congregation for 'falling off from their first Righteousness', for allowing their children to attend pagan dances, and for drinking and fornication. In presenting his argument he made specific reference to a recent funeral at which such behaviour had been evident. The central message of the letter was that the European missionaries were not strict enough in enforcing the word of God and the rules of proper Christian behaviour. As one of Monica Wilson's informants put it:

Our Christianity is a very young growth, and it must be carefully tended until it grows stronger. I think that Lazarus is right, for if men begin dancing and drinking they will go on until there is no difference between them and the pagans. It is happening already. At that funeral of Porokoto's son several pagan acquaintances laughed at me saying, 'You see Kabiki, there is no difference between us!'⁶⁸

In the smaller congregation of Pentecostals, led by a European missionary, the threat of punishment in the next life was even more emphatically and graphically delivered. The missionary warned his congregation of the dire consequences of postponing repentance, and reminded them that God could 'take' them at any time, even if the person looked healthy:

There are many who on the last day when the first Trumpet shall blow will be astonished that they did not rise up to Heaven with God. They will say, 'Why why? What have I done? Have we not been servants of God?' But he will say, 'No, I know you not.'⁶⁹

God's judgement, the congregation was warned, was not to be muddled with an earthly legal case because He, unlike the chief in charge of the court, could see inside their hearts.

In her deadpan but evocative account of a day in a Moravian girls' school, Wilson described how the fires of hell leaped into a classroom otherwise apparently dominated by the soapy suds of Christian domesticity. Each girl attending the school had two sets of white cloths that made up her uniform. The first activity of the day was to put one set of white cloths in one of the large laundry vats that occupied half of the school building. While the white cloths boiled the girls attended a scripture lesson in which the teacher explained the story of Nebuchadnezzar and the writing on the wall. Expounding on the text 'The Lord Thy God is jealous God', the teacher said:

He is like *fire*, an *angry* fire; you know that fire destroys people. We heard that the church at Utengule was burned recently. We often hear that a child has been burned by fire. Only last year the herd boy at Bwana Fundi lit a fire out in the bush and was caught in it and burned to death. God is there. God is in the fire...

Then she asked the girls, 'What wrongdoing makes God into an angry fire?' to which they put up their hands and repeated the words, 'Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not commit adultery.' One girl said that God will be like a fire to those who go secretly to pray for the ancestors. Another girl said that there was a woman who went secretly and drank beer and whispered wicked things, though she was supposed to be a Christian, and then she was drowned in the river. But this statement caused some confusion and two girls at the back of the class shouted out, 'No, it's *fire* we're talking about, not *water*!'⁷⁰

In 1937 Monica Wilson published an article on 'An African Christian Morality', which was in some ways a companion piece to Godfrey Wilson's account of the 'pagan' Nyakyusa moral system published in the previous year.⁷¹ In this piece she summarized her findings on the consequences of conversion for ideas about sin, responsibility and punishment, and for their social conduct. Though there were clear continuities between 'pagan' and Christian ideas of morality, Monica Wilson noted that in one particular respect there was a marked difference. This difference derived from the concept of the afterlife. As Godfrey Wilson's work had shown, the dead, in the form of the 'shades', were not only present in the lives of the living, but central to them. But Wilson's queries on the location of the dead met with ambiguous responses. His informants told him that the spirit (*unsyuka*) of a dead person lived in the 'place of the shades' (*ubusyuka*) and that this place was underground (*pasi*), though one man said frankly, 'No one has ever been there and come back to tell us about it.'⁷² It was a 'vague and shadowy land where no certain happiness is traditionally believed to be'.⁷³ Certainly nobody looked forward to going there. It was nothing like a Christian heaven, clearly, but neither was it Hell. Though only very vague as a destination, it was, however, important to go there fully equipped. This

appeared to be one of the implications of the sacrifices that occurred at the burials of adult men and women. In the case of the death of an adult man, the sacrifice of cattle clearly had a legal meaning, marking the transfer of rights in wives and property.⁷⁴ It also appears to have been a matter of honour, though Wilson does not use this word. To go to the grave with nothing would be an indication of the kind of lonely poverty that everyone dreaded. Not to slaughter cows for one's dead kinsmen was a deep insult to them.⁷⁵ Yet some of the commentary on this aspect of the funeral rites did seem to indicate that it was the cattle, cloth and other goods that would indeed be needed to gain entry to the 'land of the shades' and to ensure a good existence there. Wilson's informants told him that if a man died without cattle being sacrificed he might be denied entry to the 'land of the shades' by his kinsmen. Of the cloths and brass body rings buried with the body they said, 'May our fellow go with them; may he swagger with them.'⁷⁶ A more recent study reported that 'Nyakyusa people believe that the dead are under the ground where they believe that there is a city where they live'.⁷⁷ Overall, however, Wilson's research seemed to indicate that the 'afterlife' was primarily a social rather than a spatial concept. It was less a place than a community of spirits that had a marked tendency toward mobility, visiting the living in their dreams, tormenting those who had neglected their duties or who had infringed taboos, and, more positively, ensuring health, fertility and the continuation of life.

As Monica Wilson's work showed, Christian teaching on rewards and punishments in the afterlife produced a new temporal and spatial dimension to ideas about the dead. Though missionaries and Nyakyusa Christian preachers appear to have dwelt on the punishments of hell, the idea of heaven was also one that caught the spiritual imagination and which frequently occurred in the dreams of converts.⁷⁸ Christianity

not only promised the prospect of survival after death but also eternal life in a place of peace, happiness and prosperity. One of Monica Wilson's informants put it like this:

Most people who are Christian fix their hope on eternal life after death; it is this that keeps them in the right way. Very many say that though they live excellent lives here on earth, nothing will give them *peace* here, but that when they die, ah then!⁷⁹

When comparing what she called the 'two religions' (traditional beliefs and Christian ones) Wilson found, unsurprisingly, many continuities. Christian and non-Christian alike attributed misfortune to sin and believed that punishment for this would come from some external force, though the ultimate source of that power differed. But Christians were more likely to orient their thoughts of reward and punishment for sin toward the future: 'they set great store by the life to come. Eternal life constantly occurs as a theme in sermons and dreams'.⁸⁰

As in the case of Christians in Northern Rhodesia, the conduct of funerals in the much smaller Christian community studied by Monica Wilson became one important marker and test of conversion. 'Dancing', drinking, sexual display and the ritual intercourse that followed an adult burial were condemned by the Lutheran, Presbyterian and Moravian churches. As Monica Wilson's notes on Christian funerals make clear, these did not always look so distinctly different from 'pagan' ceremonies, a fact that was bemoaned by Nyakyusa Christian leaders. The wailing was less extensive, prayers were said and hymns were sung. There was no war dance. The whole event was less *noisy*, or was meant to be. For members of the Moravian and Presbyterian churches there was to be no animal sacrifice – a rule that has apparently caused tension up to this day.⁸¹

Conclusion

The colonial social anthropologists who worked in Northern Rhodesia and south-west Tanganyika in the inter-war period were initially interested in death ritual for what it had to tell them about political systems. This was particularly true in the case of the Bemba, where the elaborate chiefly death ritual, accompanied by sacrifice, invited the speculation that Bemba paramount chiefs were African examples of 'divine kings'. But beyond the spectacle were the quotidian practices, particularly those around marital sexuality, which linked Bemba subjects symbolically to the body politic and aimed to protect life and ensure its reproduction. Fear of death appears to be a human universal, yet few social anthropologists addressed this dimension. One exception was Godfrey Wilson who, in his work in south-west Tanganyika, examined the nature of this fear and the deep ambivalence expressed by the living in relation to the inevitable presence in their lives of the spirits of the dead. Here too, the close link between sexuality and death in local thought profoundly troubled the missionaries and a small but growing Christian community grappled with the consequences of running the risk of angering the spirits in order to obtain another form of immortality. Heaven and hell had a profound effect on the spiritual and political imaginations of Christians, observant and 'lapsed', but on the road to these final future destinations converts rarely managed to avoid the meddling of their ancestral spirits.

ENDNOTES: CHAPTER II

1. This is an extended version of an earlier essay published as ‘“Divine Kings”: Sex, Death and Anthropology in Inter-War East/Central Africa’, *The Journal of African History*, 49 (2008), 383–401.
2. For a similar argument see T. Saunders, ‘Making Children, Making Chiefs: Gender, Power and Ritual Legitimacy’, *Africa*, 68 (1998), 238–62, who in turn draws on the work of Thomas Beidelman, *Moral Imagination in Kaguru Modes of Thought* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993).
3. Audrey Richards, ‘Keeping the King Divine’, *Proceedings of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, (1968), 23–35. On the anthropology of ‘divine kingship’ see Gillian Feeley-Harnik’s very insightful review: ‘Issues in Divine Kingship’, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 14 (1985), 273–313.
4. Audrey Richards, ‘Tribal Government in Transition’, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 34 (1935), supplement, 1–26; Audrey Richards, ‘The Political System of the Bemba of North-Eastern Rhodesia’, in *African Political Systems*, ed. by M. Fortes and E. E. Evans-Pritchard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940), pp. 83–120; Audrey Richards, ‘Social Mechanisms for the Transfer of Political Rights in Some African Tribes’, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 90 (1960), 175–90; Max Gluckman, ‘Succession and Civil War Among the Bemba – An Exercise in Anthropological Theory’, *Rhodes-Livingstone Journal*, 16 (1954), 6–25; Richard Werbner, ‘Federal Administration, Rank and Civil Strife Among Bemba Royals and Nobles’, *Africa*, 37 (1967), 22–49;

A. L. Epstein had also carried out research among the Bemba in their homeland (as well as on the Copperbelt) in the 1950s, while W. V. Brelsford, a colonial administrator in the area, well known to Richards, has also published extensively on the subject: W. V. Brelsford, *The Succession of Bemba Chiefs: A Guide for District Officers* (Lusaka: Government Printers, 1944); W. V. Brelsford, *Aspects of Bemba Chieftainship* (Lusaka: Rhodes-Livingstone Institute Communications, No. 2, 1944).

5. The Bemba political system had evolved in the very specific circumstances of the nineteenth century. Richards showed some awareness of this, but in most of her publications she writes as if it were a timeless traditional system. For the political history of the Bemba and its evolution in the nineteenth century see Andrew Roberts, *History of the Bemba: Political Growth and Change in North-Eastern Zambia Before 1900* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, 1973), pp. 171–74 and p. 306.
6. Richards, 'Keeping the King Divine', p. 24.
7. Audrey Richards, *Land, Labour and Diet in Northern Rhodesia: An Economic Study of the Bemba Tribe* (London: Oxford University Press, 1939). On this work see also Henrietta L. Moore and Megan Vaughan, *Cutting Down Trees: Gender, Nutrition and Agricultural Change in the Northern Province of Zambia* (London: James Currey, 1995). On fertility see Richards' other major work on the Bemba: *Chisungu: A Girls' Initiation Ceremony Among the Bemba of Northern Rhodesia* (London: Faber and Faber, 1956).
8. Richards, 'Keeping the King Divine', p. 26.
9. Richards, 'Keeping the King Divine', p. 27.
10. Audrey Richards Papers held in the British Library of Political and Economic Science at the London School of Economics (hereafter 'Richards papers') – Richards papers: '1/1A: Chiefs, Death and Burial', Richards to Edmund Leach, 27 November 1982.

11. The apparent contradiction between Richards' two statements here regarding the spirits of the chief is perhaps indicative of how difficult she (and others) found it to pin down Bemba beliefs on this subject.
12. Richards, 'Keeping the King Divine', pp. 30–31.
13. Richards papers: '1/1A: Chiefs, Death and Burial'.
14. See correspondence between Richards and Wilson in both Richards papers ('1/1A: Chiefs, Death and Burial') and in Godfrey Wilson's papers held at University of Cape Town: University of Cape Town Library, Manuscripts and Archives Department, Monica and Godfrey Wilson Papers (BC 880), Wilson to Richards, 14 November 1938; Richards to Wilson, 25 November 1938 and Richards to Wilson, 13 December 1938.
15. Monica Wilson, *Divine Kings and the 'Breath of Men'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959).
16. Richards papers: '1/1A: Chiefs, Death and Burial': W. Brelsford to Audrey Richards, 27 June 1939; Paul Mushindo to Audrey Richards, 3 April 1937. On Mushindo see Lyn Schumaker, *Africanizing African Anthropology: Fieldwork, Networks and the Making of Colonial Knowledge in Central Africa* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001), and Paul Bwembya Mushindo, *The Life of a Zambian Evangelist: The Reminiscences of the Reverend Paul Bwembya Mushindo* (Lusaka: University of Zambia, Institute for African Studies, 1973).
17. Feely-Harnik, 'Issues in Divine Kingship'.
18. Richards was presumably referring to the death of a chief that had occurred during her last visit to Northern Rhodesia in 1957. Richards papers: '1/1A: Chiefs, Death and Burial', Richards to Edmund Leach, 27 November 1982.
19. Feely-Harnik, 'Issues in Divine Kingship', p. 274.
20. Ibid. See also Florence Bernault's discussion of sacrifice and her conversation with a Catholic priest: 'Body, Power and Sacrifice', *Journal of African History*, 47 (2006), 207–39.
21. Agamben's discussion of 'homo sacer' is relevant here: Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*,

- trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995); see also Benjamin Noys' discussion of Agamben: *The Culture of Death* (London: Berg, 2005).
22. Richards knew one Chitimukulu well – this was Chitimukulu Kanyanta.
 23. Piers Vitebsky, 'The Death and Regeneration of a "Divine King": A Preliminary Account of the Mortuary Rites of the Paramount Chief (Citimukulu) of the Bemba of Zambia, Based on the Unpublished Fieldnotes of Audrey Richards', *Cambridge Anthropology*, 10, 1 (1985), 56–91.
 24. Vitebsky, 'Death and Regeneration', p. 67.
 25. *Mukolo*, the head wife; *mushika*, a military captain, the holder of the chief's drinking straw; *wacinkuli*, the holder of the chief's cannabis pipe, the public crier, a slave-companion since childhood; *chamata*, a standard-bearer; *cishiko*, sexually pure female cook; *kateule-kateke*, fetcher-and-carrier, man who carries the chief on his shoulders (see Vitebsky, 'Death and Regeneration', p. 70, based on information from Mushindo and Brelsford).
 26. Richards papers: '1/1A: Chiefs, Death and Burial', Paul Mushindo (iv 1934), trans. by Patrick Mumba in 1975.
 27. On the position of the Shimwalule see Vernon Brelsford, 'Shimwalule: A Study of a Bemba Priest and Chief', *African Studies*, 1 (1942), 207–23.
 28. This traditional form of 'embalming' aimed to dry out the body completely, reducing it to a 'seed'-like substance. This is very different from the other forms of embalming (practised in present-day Zambia as elsewhere), which aim to slow down decomposition and create an appearance of wholeness.
 29. Phyllis Palgi and Henry Abramovitch, 'Death: A Cross-Cultural Perspective', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 13 (1984), 385–417 (p. 389).
 30. Brelsford, *Succession of Bemba Chiefs*, quoted in Vitebsky, 'Death and Regeneration', p. 80.

31. See Richard Werbner's analysis of the nineteenth-century evidence: 'Federal Administration, Rank and Civil Strife among Bemba Royals and Nobles', *Africa*, 37 (1967), 22–49.
32. Max Gluckman, 'Succession and Civil War'.
33. Zambian National Archives (hereafter ZNA), Mporokoso District Notebook, enclosure of 21.10.24; ZNA: KTQ, Nkula Succession 1937.
34. ZNA: Sec 2/308: Chitimukulu Succession Enquiry 1944–1947.
35. This was especially the case after the 1935 disturbances on the Copperbelt.
36. Audrey Richards had drawn attention to some of these contradictions in an early paper on colonial rule and chiefly power in Lubemba: 'Tribal Government in Transition: The BaBemba of North-Eastern Rhodesia', *Journal of the Royal African Society*, 34 (1935) 1–26.
37. Richards papers: '1/1A: Chiefs, Death and Burial: Copy of Vernon Brelsford's Tour Report', Chinsali District 5/1939.
38. Zambian press reports of the most recent burial of a Chitimukulu (Mutake Ng'andu, 2005) give a similar impression of the political utility of the maintenance of a degree of mystique – but perhaps I am being too cynical here.
39. Richards papers: '1/1A: Chiefs: Death and Burial: Eyewitness Accounts of Burial Ceremonies: R. Bush's (Chinsali's Messenger's (1938) Account of the Burial of Chief Nkula'.
40. Richards papers: '1/8 Chiefs: General and Administrative: Thomas Fox-Pitt to Richards', 8 August 1936 (writing from Mpika).
41. Vitebsky, 'Death and Regeneration', p. 73.
42. Richards papers: '1/34/HH: Case Studies'.
43. For Richards' own accounts of 'Commoners' deaths see Richards papers: '2/12/1: Mortuary Ritual (Commoners)'.
44. See Foucault's arguments on death and sovereignty: Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley, 3 vols (London: Penguin, 1979), I.

45. Richards papers: '1/34/HH: Case Studies: Course of Death', Chinsali June 1931.
46. Dr Brown features in this paper on several occasions. Brown was a medical doctor and minister of the Church of Scotland, who worked at the Lubwa Mission from 1927 to his death in 1947. My thanks to David Brown for allowing me to consult these papers.
47. Brelsford explains that during after the 1924 Chitimukulu succession dispute, the new incumbent, Chitimukulu Kanyanta, had initially refused to acknowledge the rightful heir to the position of Shimwalule and had put his younger brother, Chandamali, in his place. However, under pressure from the councillors, the Chitimukulu was forced to revoke this decision. Brelsford wrote that 'Chandamali still lives at Chinsali, though I doubt if he could be called the third living Shimwalule since he never buried anyone and his title was always in dispute while he held it'. Brelsford, 'Shimwalule', p. 212.
48. Richards does not explain this but I take it to mean that, as a burier of chiefs, he was ritually impure – though, as Brelsford points out, Chandamali had never, in fact, buried any chief.
49. Richards papers: '1/34/HH: Course of Death', Chinsali June 1931.
50. For an alternative view of 'traditional' Bemba spirituality see Hugo Hinfelaar, *Bemba-Speaking Women of Zambia in a Century of Religious Change, 1892-1992* (Leiden: Brill, 1994).
51. Of course, there were good academic reasons for this, since she was interested in the Bemba political system, amongst other things, but in her personal letters to her mother and sister Richards also confessed to her soft spot for 'the aristocracy'.
52. Bronislaw Malinowski, *The Sexual Lives of Savages in North-Western Melanesia* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1929).

53. Monica Hunter, *Reaction to Conquest: Effects of Contact with Europeans on the Pondo of South Africa* (London: Lit Verlag, 1996); *Inside African Anthropology: Monica Wilson and her Interpreters*, ed. by Andrew Bank and Leslie J. Bank (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).
54. James Gordon Ellison, 'Transforming Obligations, Performing Identity: Making the Nyakyusa in a Colonial Context' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Florida, 1999).
55. Godfrey Wilson, 'Nyakyusa Conventions of Burial', *Bantu Studies*, 13 (1939), 1–31; Godfrey Wilson, 'An African Morality', *Africa*, 9 (1936), 75–99; Monica Wilson, 'Nyakyusa Ritual and Symbolism', *American Anthropologist*, 56 (1954), 228–41; Monica Wilson, *Rituals of Kinship Among the Nyakyusa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957), Chapter 3.
56. Godfrey Wilson, 'Nyakyusa Conventions of Burial', p. 1.
57. Ibid.
58. Wilson papers: 'Autopsy' (uncatalogued papers), Godfrey Wilson, 16/3/37 and 23/3/37.
59. Wilson papers: 'B2, Letters from Godfrey Wilson to Monica Wilson': 28/12/36 and 29/1/36: 'In most cases there is a most interesting double symbolism: first an association with death, and then with the madness that is supposed to result from omitting the ritual...'
60. Wilson papers: 'B2, Letters from Godfrey Wilson to Monica Wilson', 8–10/5/37.
61. Monica Wilson, 'Nyakyusa Ritual', p. 228.
62. Monica Wilson, 'Nyakyusa Ritual', p. 230.
63. Wilson papers: 'B2, Letters from Godfrey Wilson to Monica Wilson', 28/12/36.
64. Wilson papers: 'B2, Letters from Godfrey Wilson to Monica Wilson', 8–10/5/37.
65. Ibid.
66. Wilson papers: 'B2, Letters from Godfrey Wilson to Monica Wilson', 9/3/37.

67. Wilson papers: 'D4.4. Monica Wilson Notes on Sermons', 11/8/36.
68. Wilson papers: 'D4.4. Monica Wilson Notes on Sermons', 25/10/36.
69. Wilson papers: (uncatalogued) 'Monica Wilson notes on American Pentecostal Church', n.d.
70. Wilson papers: 'D4.7 Monica Wilson's notes on Nyakyusa Christians: "Visit to experimental girls' school, Rungwe, September 1936"'.
71. Monica Wilson, 'An African Christian Morality', *Africa*, 10 (1937), 265–92; Godfrey Wilson, 'African Morality'.
72. Wilson, *Rituals of Kinship*, p. 17.
73. *Ibid.*; Monica Wilson, 'An African Christian Morality', p. 280.
74. Wilson, *Rituals of Kinship*, p. 20.
75. Monica Wilson, *Religion and the Transformation of Society: A Study in Social Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. 77.
76. Wilson, *Rituals of Kinship*, p. 20.
77. Arnold Lwitiko, *Imani ya Wanyakyusa juu ya kifo na maisha baada ya kufa kulinganisha na Biblia*, 1983, cited in Kenani Abraham Njela Mwasomola, 'Contemporary Christian Responses to Nyakyusa Rituals: Chiefs, Pastors and Purification' (unpublished masters thesis, Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, 2010). My thanks to Professor Terence Ranger for directing me to this study.
78. Dreams played an important role in Nyakyusa spirituality, as Godfrey Wilson's work showed. Monica Wilson collected accounts of dreams from her Christian informants: Wilson papers: 'D4.2, Monica Wilson, Christian Amusements and Dreams'. See also Monica Wilson, 'African Christian Morality', p. 270.
79. Monica Wilson, 'African Christian Morality', p. 280.
80. Monica Wilson, 'African Christian Morality', p. 290.
81. See Mwasomola, 'Nyakyusa Rituals', for a detailed and first-hand account.

CHAPTER III

Death, Christianity and African Miners: Contesting Indirect Rule on the Zambian Copperbelt, 1935–1962

Walima T. Kalusa

Introduction

Early in 1956, Mukuka Nkoloso, a budding, mission-educated Bemba-speaking nationalist, had an old score to settle with the white District Commissioner of Ndola, the commercial and administrative hub of the colonial Zambian Copperbelt. Storming the DC's office, Nkoloso demanded to know why the town's European foreman, acting under the instructions of the colonial functionary, had been exhuming African corpses from a cemetery near Kabushi Location and relocating them to the outskirts of the town, despite stiff opposition from the inhabitants of the Location. Mukuka Nkoloso had earlier on added his own shrill chorus to the public outcry by complaining in the media against this desecration of the cemetery. This move had earned him the warm support of the African Urban Advisory Council, of which the nationalist himself was a member. Exasperated by the nationalist's audacity to challenge the decision to inter the African dead on the outskirts of Ndola, the colonial officer threatened Nkoloso that he (the DC) 'would call a meeting of the chiefs of the district where he would recommend the deportation' of the recalcitrant political upstart to his 'home district' in north-eastern Zambia. 'I don't

care,' shouted the equally infuriated Nkoloso, as he stormed out of the European official's office.¹

Confrontations between colonial rulers and their subjects over issues of mortality and the disposal of the remains of the dead were ubiquitous on the African imperial frontier. Fuelled by the 'politics of death,'² such altercations frequently took place in areas as far removed in time and space as nineteenth century Ghana and South Africa, and twentieth-century Namibia, Cameroon, Botswana and, of course, the Zambian Copperbelt.³ In spite of their ubiquity and pervasiveness, these conflicts have surprisingly drawn little or no attention in historical writings. The gap in academic scholarship has been partly filled by social and symbolic anthropologists, whose main preoccupation since colonial rule has been to elucidate the cultural meaning and symbolism that non-Western societies infuse into death with its associated rituals.⁴ Symbolic anthropologists have long explored the myriad and significant avenues in which localized experiences of funerals and internments either wear thin or solidify kinship relationships and local networks of political power and authority.⁵ They have thus impressively demonstrated the significant role that death and rituals of mortality play in the exercise of chiefly power and social control at the grassroots level. Crucial as such analyses may be, they nonetheless open a very small window on how historical dynamics influence what anthropologist David Mandelbaum describes as the 'social uses' of mortuary and burial rites.⁶ This stems in part from the fact that such analyses scarcely shed light on how social, economic and political changes influence societal notions and practices of mortality.⁷ It is no surprise then that anthropological studies gloss over the ways in which African knowledge of and practices around death have mutated in response to such extra-local dynamics as colonial penetration, labour migration, urbanization, Christianity and, more recently, nationalism,

cross-border migration and globalization.⁸ In locating death, its rituals and their underlying belief systems outside the historical context in which they occur, anthropological interpretations obscure fundamental transformations that take place in the social and cultural meaning of death and of its rituals when societies come under the pressure of socio-economic and political change. It is no surprise, then, that symbolic analyses of mortuary and practices hardly elucidate what symbolic meanings of death and death-related rituals actually signify in real-life conditions.⁹

By emphasizing the role of ceremonies of death in shaping local networks of power at local level, the anthropological discourse on mortality obfuscates how death with its rituals mediates relations between rulers who monopolize centralized state power and those that they govern. It is no wonder, then, that such discourses largely skirt how the subjects of empire deployed their shifting knowledge of dying, death and interment to not only contest but also to wrest power from their unwilling colonial masters.¹⁰

This study makes a modest attempt to rectify some of the shortcomings in the academic literature that glosses over the historicity of African knowledge of death and neglects the role that mortality and its related rituals played in shaping power relations between colonial authorities and their African subjects in the twentieth century. Taking its lead from contemporary debates that perceive disease, medicine, aging and mortality as socio-political constructs rather than biological givens,¹¹ this chapter seeks to illuminate why death became a contested terrain between British rulers and African mineworkers on the Zambian Copperbelt from 1935 to 1964. The study moves away from the all-too-familiar interpretation that casts the death-related confrontations that frequently erupted between colonizers and colonized as the consequence of conflicting knowledge and practices over mortality that the

two camps brought to their encounter – a view that, for example, informs Sandra Greene’s and Myron Echenberg’s work on colonial Ghana and Senegal respectively.¹² To the contrary, this paper maintains that such conflicts were the results of the ways in which African mineworkers on the Copperbelt appropriated Christianity to recreate their knowledge as well as their culture of death. More specifically, the paper asserts that the root of the conflicts in question lay in the manner in which black workers deployed their Christianized discourse of death to forge urban identities, to rework inter-ethnic social relations and, above all, to contest chiefly power and hence British Indirect Rule. In rethinking and deploying their culture of death and praxis in this way, African migrants in the Copperbelt confounded the colonial meta-narrative that dismissed them as no more than ‘primitive tribesmen’ incapable of socially adjusting to urban life without serious socio-cultural trauma.¹³ Through the new culture of death that the miners themselves constructed from raw materials deriving from Christianity and their own engagement with each other, the workers demonstrated their cultural imagination and entrepreneurship. In so doing, they reversed colonial discourses that imaged them as little more than social or cultural misfits. Consequently, they confounded their colonial masters’ efforts to govern them through ‘tribal’ institutions, the cornerstone of the system of Indirect Rule in rural Northern Rhodesia (Zambia).

The Copperbelt, Labour Migration and Indirect Rule

After the economic depression of the late 1920s and the early 1930s, the mining industry in the Copperbelt entered a phase of phenomenal expansion creating insatiable demand for African labour. Assisted in their labour mobilization efforts by

the cash-strapped colonial state eager to raise revenue through taxing the new industry, mining companies in the mining area from the onset drew their labour from virtually every ethnic group in the colony. But the industry's ever-growing demands for labour could not entirely be met locally. It therefore also recruited African labour from adjacent neighbouring colonies, including Nyasaland, Tanganyika, Angola and Southern Rhodesia.¹⁴ By the close of the Second World War the Copperbelt, with its more than 140,000 Africans and 8,000 Europeans, had consequently the highest concentration of urban population in the territory. This trend continued well into the post-war period due to rising labour demands within the copper industry and emerging secondary industries stipulated by mining. Thus, the African population at the mines shot up from 175,747 in 1951 to 252,764 in 1956 and 485,654 in 1963. On the other hand, the number of Europeans in the Copperbelt increased from 21,907 in 1946 to 73,000 thirteen years later. Combined, the growing black and white populations in the mining region ultimately made it one of the most urbanized regions in sub-Saharan Africa.¹⁵

The urban agglomerations at the mines of such an ethnically, linguistically and culturally disparate African population turned out to be an administrative nightmare that dogged colonial and mine authorities in Zambia well up to its political emancipation from Britain in 1964. At the root of this problem was the absence in mine compounds of a ready-made administrative machinery through which the ethnically heterogeneous workers could be controlled, and transformed into a disciplined industrial workforce without leading to what the authorities, mining companies, missionaries and contemporary scholars routinely described as 'detrribalization'.¹⁶ Underlying this apprehension was the assumption in colonial circles that Africans lived and were traditionally governed in small-scale 'face-to-face communities'.¹⁷ According to such

assumptions, Africans derived their identities from clan and tribe as opposed to class, nation or free association. They could thus 'neither think nor behave like individuals relating to other individuals within a broader society'.¹⁸ Unsurprisingly, even though colonial academics often demonstrated that urbanization was taking place on the Copperbelt during most of the time under probe,¹⁹ colonizers continued to insist that the African was incapable of adjusting to urban life without suffering telling social and cultural trauma. To the advocates of this discourse, Africans in towns were an aberration, social misfits incapable of cultural imagination.

European policymakers and the captains of the mining industry in the colony were anxious to forestall for as long as possible the emergence of a permanently urbanized African workforce at the mines. Both parties perceived the urbanization of black miners as a potential time bomb. They feared that such workers would begin to demand labour conditions and political rights equal to those of Europeans. In the official mind, this was a potent recipe for social and political anarchy that would in turn pose a major threat to the exercise of colonial power. Thus, right from the outset of industrial mining in the territory, the authorities preferred the system of labour migrancy rather than the permanent settlement of labourers in the Copperbelt. African migrants would periodically leave their families in rural areas to work in the mines, returning to 'rest' for an unspecified period of time in their villages. Not only would this push the cost of labour reproduction on to rural pre-capitalist economies,²⁰ it would also insulate African migrants from the evils of urbanization with its offshoot of 'detribalization,' and prevent them from becoming demanding proletarians or losing their communal identities.

This policy rested on the assumption that, through periodic visits to their villages, African migrants would continue to maintain their cultural ties to the countryside. The oscillation

of labour between country and town would in turn uphold existing social, economic and political institutions in rural areas to which the miners were expected to retire in sickness, old age and, presumably, death. In this way, African workers in the Copperbelt would not disencumber themselves from their kinship networks or discard the cultural knowledge or institutions through which they traditionally ordered their socio-economic life,²¹ and – more importantly for the purpose of this paper – managed death.

The roots of European apprehension over the disintegration of ‘tribal’ culture in urban settings were far deeper than one might assume. To white authorities, ‘detribalization’ was no less inimical to their political supremacy than it was an obstacle to their efforts to extend to the mining towns the patriarchal authority of African Native Authorities on whom British Indirect Rule relied, and through whom colonizers made claims on local resources. As Frederick Cooper remarks, Indirect Rule was predicated on the assumption that the social, economic and political institutions that Europeans encountered in Africa were so deeply rooted in indigenous culture that they could not be radically changed without unleashing profound political and social instability – anathema to the exercise of imperial power.²²

It was this concern that underlay the efforts of the Provincial Commissioner of the Western province (now the Copperbelt) to introduce to the mines after the 1935 African mineworkers’ strike the rurally based system of Native Authorities.²³ In so doing, he hoped to duplicate at the mines the authority traditional rulers enjoyed over their subjects in rural settings. In this manner, the colonial state would extend chiefly political authority and power in mining towns.²⁴ Underpinning the PC’s efforts was the popular assumption in European ruling hierarchies that Africans in urban areas would (or should), for the foreseeable future, continue to be linked by timeless ethnic

and cultural institutions that bound them together. To the authorities, black miners in the Copperbelt could only be efficiently governed through their 'tribal' chiefs and institutions.

But the move to extend the Native Authority system to the mines was quickly thwarted by the Rhodesia Selection Trust and the Anglo-American Corporation. Both companies were eager to exert their own brand of social control over their African labourers and, more significantly, to keep colonial administrators in the colony out of mine compounds.²⁵ Yet both colonial and mine functionaries were keen to check the urbanization of black labour, which, in their mind, was synonymous with African 'detrribalization'.²⁶ As a compromise, the colonial administrators recognized in the 1930s the system of 'tribal' elders earlier instituted at the mines by mining companies as a means of social control over their labourers.²⁷ In exchange, the companies accepted the establishment by the colonial state of African urban courts in the emerging mining localities. These courts were mandated to ensure the survival of indigenous culture at the mines through the enforcement of regulations or orders promulgated by Native Authorities in rural areas.²⁸ To bolster the authority of the elders and court assessors, and hence the power of African chiefs over their subjects in the Copperbelt, colonials officials nominated 'tribal' elders and assessors to sit on Urban African Advisory Councils established by the colonial state in the late 1930s to keep it 'fully informed of the developments amongst [the educated] African population' in urban areas.²⁹ This was a double-edged strategy to bolster chiefly power in urban areas while simultaneously muting the growing influence of the Western-educated African elite, who regarded themselves as the natural rulers of the emerging towns and as agents of modernity.³⁰

Much ink has been spilled over the role the so-called 'tribal' elders and their counterparts in urban courts played in the drama of labour disputes and in mediating social relations in

the mining area from the 1930s to the 1960s.³¹ For our purposes, it will suffice to merely reiterate that both of these institutions were created principally to be the bulwark against the erosion of African culture that both mine and colonial authorities feared would follow on the heels of the urbanization of black employees in the Copperbelt. European authorities hoped that elders and court assessors could ensure the survival at the copper mines of indigenous mortality beliefs, save for, of course, those that the authorities dismissed as either repugnant to their cultural sensibilities or inimical to public health and to the maintenance of socio-political order.³² This assumption ensued not least from the fact that 'tribal' elders and assessors enjoyed royal connections with traditional rulers in the countryside, the latter appointing and dismissing them in the post-war period.³³ Under this arrangement, African court assessors and elders would play a not insignificant role in the colonizer's efforts to extend chiefly political and ritual power over their subjects in the mines.³⁴ This in turn would ensure the survival of African customs and institutions in the mining area. For the administrators in the colony and beyond, this was critical to the fulfilment of their larger but contradictory agenda to maintain social and political order while simultaneously promoting 'progressive change' on the imperial frontier.³⁵

Owing to the complex ethnic and cultural heterogeneity that came to characterize the Copperbelt, it is impossible within the scope of this paper to exhaustively review local beliefs and praxis around death that colonial rulers expected to be replicated in the industrial arena. However, some of these beliefs and practices cut across ethnic and linguistic boundaries. Briefly, Africans located the source of mortality in ruptured social relationships between kinsfolk in the deceased's lineage, or between one of its members and the invisible Other. In this vein, managing death involved the surviving kin performing

complex mortuary and burial ceremonies in order to either mend the ruptured relations in the concerned lineage or to appease the offended ancestors. In African communities, such ceremonies were universally perceived as indispensable to the smooth passage of the spirits of the deceased from the physical world of the living to the meta-physical world of ancestors. If properly buried in accordance with these culturally recognized rituals, the dead, now turned ancestors, protected their living kin. If not, they became socially disembodied, visiting misfortune after misfortune including sickness and death upon their erring living relations.³⁶

Since chiefs and other traditional authorities in most African societies acted as intermediaries between the living and the invisible Other, the rituals of mortality were only carried out with the explicit permission of local political elites. For example, among the Bemba-speaking people of the north-eastern part of the colony, the region that exported the largest number of miners to the Copperbelt throughout the period under review, it was chiefs who would decide when, where and sometimes even how the deceased could be interred. Moreover, in the event of the death of the Bemba paramount Chitimukulu, his subjects were expected to abstain from sexual activity and to carry out lengthy and complicated mortuary ceremonies in order to 'warm' the land and thus ensure its fertility and that of its inhabitants.³⁷ Among their Bisa neighbours to the south, no announcement of death could be made in the village unless the chief or headman first granted permission to beat the 'death drum' (kamangu), a practice that persists to this day.³⁸ Finally, as late as the 1950s, the well-known anthropologist Victor Turner observed that the Lunda-Ndembu of Zambia's Mwinilunga district suspended the cultivation of crops for a whole year following the passing away of their chief.³⁹

Though few, these examples are indicative of the fact that, in African society, ceremonies of death and internment were

inextricably interwoven into the exercise of political authority and power, a point that Wyatt MacGaffey makes most poignantly in his illuminating exploration of religion and society in the lower Congo (formerly Zaire).⁴⁰ Apart from solidifying the political status of traditional rulers, these rituals also served as a significant barometer of their authority and power over their subjects.⁴¹ It is not by accident, then, that traditional rulers across the length and breadth of colonial Zambia welcomed the colonial state's policy not to intervene in existing culture of death and to extend their ritual power to the Copperbelt.⁴²

From this perspective, it is not too difficult to comprehend why Chief Makasa of the Bemba people was 'utterly appalled' when he discovered on his visit to Nkana mine during the Second World War that his followers who died there were interred with their heads 'facing in any direction', rather than the east as was done at 'home'. The chief dismissed this as an 'alien practice'. Before he left Nkana, he ordered the Bemba elder at the mine to ensure that his subjects who died there were henceforth unfailingly buried in such a way that 'the head of the corpse faced the right direction'. He also strongly warned his followers against adopting the burial practices of 'foreigners', i.e. non-Bemba-speaking miners.⁴³

The Bemba sovereign was not alone in venting his mortuary concerns. When his counterpart, Chief Mailo of the Lala in Serenje district visited Roan Antelope mine in March 1959 to sanction or invalidate Lala marriages and to hear 'all types of cases which involve[d]' his 'tribesmen', he too expressed displeasure at the fact that his subjects there were not mourning the dead according to 'traditional' funerary practices.⁴⁴ The Lala ruler, who on this visit represented Paramount Chief Kankomba-We-Lala, was, however, relieved to see that the elders and court assessors from Serenje were 'working in exactly the same way as [chiefs did] at home' and

would presumably, therefore, put an end to 'alien' customs of marriage, mourning and interring the dead.⁴⁵

In their endeavour to influence the social management of death on the Copperbelt, Chiefs Makasa and Mailo, together with other traditional rulers, hoped to impose their own power and control over their people in the industrial setting. Unsurprisingly, they were not slow to appoint 'tribal' elders and courts assessors as their 'eyes and ears'. They also unfailingly dismissed them from office if found wanting in their duty to enforce at the mines the regulations promulgated by Native Authorities in rural areas.⁴⁶ To ensure that court assessors and elders enforced their ethnic mortuary rites and other customs on the Copperbelt, chiefs periodically visited their 'tribal' representatives and enjoined them against 'alien' customs of death they encountered in mine compounds.

It may be obvious from these remarks that European authorities and African rulers formed an alliance to enforce 'traditional' mortuary culture in urban areas. Collectively, they sought to turn 'tribal' elders and court assessors into the vanguard against the disintegration of African culture in the Copperbelt, which they uncritically accepted as an inevitable aftermath of urbanization. As the 'eyes and ears' of chiefs, 'tribal' envoys were to be the custodians of the pre-industrial cultural/moral order in mine compounds. These chiefly appointees were to uphold and dispense to successive generations of black mineworkers pre-existing knowledge and practices surrounding kinship relations, marriage and inheritance.⁴⁷ No less importantly, they were to etch on the urban space their 'tribal' eschatological beliefs and mortuary practices, ensuring that their kinsfolk always buried their dead in rigid conformity with time-honoured traditions. Through the elders and assessors, then, 'tribal' knowledge and rituals of death would run their natural course in the Copperbelt, unsoiled by any form of cultural transaction between workers in the compounds.

Colonial administrators in British Zambia hoped to reinforce this situation by interfering as little as possible with African knowledge of death and mortuary, and burial practice. Therefore, even though the RST and the AAC established from the outset mortuaries and cemeteries in or near mine compounds, where deceased workers were buried free of charge,⁴⁸ colonial and mining companies seldom intervened in the miners' rituals of death.⁴⁹ This attitude stemmed from the realization among the authorities that such rituals were inextricably intertwined with virtually all aspects of African life ranging from marriage, sexuality and inheritance to political power, social control and religion.⁵⁰ The authorities thus saw the preservation of local knowledge and practices around death as crucial to the smooth running of African society. It is little wonder, then, that they allied themselves with traditional rulers in defence of the African culture of mortality. As a corollary, they repeatedly sponsored chiefs to visit the Copperbelt to reinforce the conservative cultural work of their 'tribal' representatives on the mines, a trend that continued well up to the 1960s.⁵¹

It is noteworthy that the premium placed by colonial administrators on preserving in towns indigenous knowledge of death and its repertoire was inexorably tied to their wider efforts to shape colonial socio-economic and political processes. In seeking to conserve local beliefs and practices of death in mine compounds, European rulers legitimized the binary divisions they drew between their own culture of death and that of the colonized, which colonial administrators and settlers routinely dismissed as 'primitive' and missionaries as the bastion of African 'pagan' beliefs. This discourse provided the justification for the establishment of racially segregated mortuaries and cemeteries in the Copperbelt and beyond. This was a short step to buttressing other segregationist policies that denied the subjects of empire social, economic and

political privileges enjoyed by 'civilized' Europeans. Unlike Europeans, Africans could not permanently live in urban areas, enjoy full citizenship rights, or acquire other markers of modernity that imperial agents and white settlers across Africa saw as their exclusive monopoly.⁵² In the Copperbelt, the official rhetoric not to interfere with African culture of death was, therefore, no more than an attempt to secure and legitimize colonial power. It was a strategy by which the colonizer sought to entrench racial, cultural and imperial ideologies at the root of Western hegemony in twentieth-century Zambia.⁵³

It is in this context that we may comprehend why colonial authorities and mine managements in colonial Zambia vehemently opposed African urbanization and 'detribalization' on the mines. This opposition continued long after the Second World War, when, for reasons beyond the scope of this paper, both parties officially appreciated the desirability of and firmly declared their intention to help the stabilization of black labour in the Copperbelt.⁵⁴ Thus, even as late as 1956, Ronald Prain, the Chairman of the Rhodesian Selection Trust, eloquently declared that although it was his company's policy to stabilize labour, it was neither its intention to encourage African workers to sever cultural ties with their villages of origin nor to help them settle in mining towns after retirement. His company, Prain added, would therefore foster stabilization without urbanization, with its offshoots of individualism, proletarianization and 'detribalization'.⁵⁵ To Prain, as to other captains of the mining industry in Zambia, labour stabilization simply meant lengthening the time African workers spent on the Copperbelt. This policy came to fruition for the mining companies after 1945 when it became not uncommon for some black miners to spend as long as twenty to thirty years of their working life at the copper mines.⁵⁶

Christianity and Rethinking the Culture of Death on the Copperbelt

With its high mortality rates, its complex social composition and its political economy, the Copperbelt was scarcely an empty space where migrants could easily etch their 'traditional' culture of death intact. As documented at length elsewhere, the copper industry witnessed extremely high death rates, especially in the early days, entering popular imagination as 'death valley'.⁵⁷ This engendered profound fear of death among African miners. According to anthropologist Hortense Powdermaker, who carried out fieldwork in the Copperbelt in the 1950s, this fear of death found its vivid expression in well-known dirges in the mining region, some of which she recorded.⁵⁸

Death in colonial mining centres raised the deeply worrisome question of whether the spirits of deceased mineworkers whose corpses were first kept in mortuaries and later buried in mine cemeteries would leave the physical world of the living and enter the metaphysical realm of the invisible Other.⁵⁹ To African workers at the copper mines, the ontological insecurity engendered by the prospect of dying and being buried away from 'home' was all the more real for one major reason. Death there occurred outside of the network of social relations through which the living traditionally conducted ceremonies of death essential to the transition of the dead from the physical world to the transcendental sphere.⁶⁰ This fear gave way to an urgent search among African labourers throughout the sub-region for a re-examination of the meaning of death and of existing mortuary and burial rituals in an effort to comprehend mortality and construct a new culture of managing it within the industrial context.⁶¹ It was this acute search for meaning that spawned Christian rites by which mineworkers hoped to no less contain their fear of mortality than to subvert

chiefly political and ritual power, and thus Indirect Rule itself, in the Zambian Copperbelt. But this is getting ahead of the story.

Divided by linguistic, ethnic and cultural barriers, the first generation of migrants to the Copperbelt may have found few answers in their search for meaning and for constructing an inter-ethnically acceptable culture of death. But their social and cultural divisions apparently turned the construction of a mutually comprehensible culture of death into an urgent affair.⁶² This was eased by their involvement in the wage economy, the absence of ethnic segregation in the workers' housing arrangements in mine compounds and at work, and the resultant daily social intercourse between them.⁶³ The new culture of death that emerged from such interaction did not just cut across ethnic, linguistic and cultural barriers. It also, as later demonstrated, transformed African workers into co-sharers of similar eschatological beliefs and of a uniform discourse of death.

Christianity was of singular importance among the raw materials from which miners crafted new knowledge and practices to cope with the omnipresent spectre of dying away from 'home'. Before examining the ways in which miners drew upon Christianity to rethink their comprehension of death and its allied rituals, we should briefly review the history of the faith on the Copperbelt. Contrary to popular opinion, Christianity preceded European missionaries to the Copperbelt. Christianity was pioneered in the mining area in the mid-1920s by a small but influential class of mission-educated migrant workers who subsequently constituted the nucleus of African leadership in both the religious and secular spheres, with far-reaching implications for the socio-economic and political evolution of the Copperbelt.⁶⁴

Prominent among such pioneers were particularly skilled miners from Nyasaland (now Malawi). Known as 'Nyasa boys'

in the mines, these men had attended mission-controlled schools in colonial Malawi and subsequently acquired mining experience in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and South Africa. Enticed to the Copperbelt during the construction boom of the 1920s by mining companies eager to exploit their skills, these mission graduates worked closely with a smaller but equally influential group of locally educated teachers, clerks and pastors to plant the Word on the Copperbelt soil. Long before any white missionary appeared on the scene, they erected mud-and-pole church buildings, recruited black missionaries from Malawi, elected boards of church elders to oversee the discipline and the evangelical work of their churches, and introduced the Gospel in African mine compounds. By the mid-1930s, these Christians had reportedly attracted to their churches hundreds of other miners, irrespective of their ethnic or linguistic background. And from their efforts eventually emerged the Union Church of the Copperbelt, which from 1936 on was absorbed into European-run Protestant churches that emerged at the copper mines.⁶⁵

Crucial as these initiatives were to the penetration of the new faith in the Copperbelt, Christian evangelism hardly took a firm form in the mine compounds until after the 1935 African mineworkers' strike – notwithstanding that a few European missionaries under the Catholic Church, the Dutch Reformed Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church dominated by black South African missionaries had begun to proselytize in the compounds prior to the labour dispute.⁶⁶ Convinced that the strike itself was one of the undesirable consequences of 'detribalization' and of the inadequate attention paid to African education and Christian teaching in the area, the colonial state joined hands with mining companies in lobbying Protestant missionary societies within the colony and their home boards abroad to extend their evangelical crusade to the mines.⁶⁷ Colonial and mine functionaries shared the perception that

through Western education and proselytization, European missionaries in the Copperbelt would wield a sharp sword with which they could purge mine compounds of incipient immorality, gambling and drunkenness among African miners. The authorities envisaged that the Christianization of African labourers would transform them into a disciplined industrial workforce. This would simultaneously insulate them from the crippling forces of 'detribalization', the Watch Tower Movement and, from the late 1940s onward, communism.⁶⁸ As the spiritual wing of industrial capitalism, European evangelists were therefore to play a major role in moulding the religious, moral and cultural landscape of the mines.

In pursuit of these wider goals, the state and mining companies persuaded Protestant missionary societies to establish in July 1939 the United Missions in the Copperbelt (UMCB). The UMCB immediately set out to energize the hitherto lukewarm mission evangelical efforts in the area. With increasing material and fiscal support from the companies to build churches, and funding from the state to run public schools,⁶⁹ the UMCB initially consisted of four missionary agencies. These were the London Missionary Society, the Church of Scotland, the Methodist Church and the South African Baptist Church, whose missionary, Arthur J. Cross, became the umbrella body's first leader on the Copperbelt. By the late 1930s and early 1940s, the UMCB had also attracted into its fold the Christian Missions in Many Lands, the South African General Mission and the Parish Evangelical Society. It also received the bulk of state resources for running schools in the Copperbelt, with the result that by 1942 there were more than six thousand African pupils in its schools at the mines alone.⁷⁰ Its member churches were also in charge of very large congregations; by the late 1930s some of these boasted of as many as three hundred members, the majority of whom were reportedly 'Nyasa boys' – Bemba, Lunda, Bisa, Luvala and Lozi miners.⁷¹

In spite of their efforts to cooperate in their evangelical and educational work, the Christian denominations that converged on the copper mines often propounded deeply conflicting doctrines and fiercely competed with each other to reclaim the lost souls of the African labourers for Christ.⁷² However, their attitudes toward African beliefs and practices around death were remarkably uniform, regardless of whether the denominations were under Protestant or Catholic clerics. European evangelists all viewed African beliefs and rituals related to death as the fortress of 'heathenism' that had to be torn down before they could firmly erect the kingdom of God on the Copperbelt. Particularly offensive to their eschatological sensibilities was the African belief in the mystical power of ancestors to inflict disease, misfortune and death – or blessings – upon the living. Missionaries were equally opposed to existing ceremonies of mortality. This is because such rituals as much venerated the dead as they cemented the relationship between the living and the dead, while strengthening the interpersonal and lineage relationships within which the colonized traditionally managed death.

Unsurprisingly, Christian missionaries across the Copperbelt launched an evangelical frontal onslaught on the existing eschatological fortress and culture of death. Preaching at funeral and prayer services at Nkana mine in the late 1930s, R. J. B. Moore of the London Missionary Society, whose evangelical zeal on the Copperbelt became renowned for its 'prophetic intensity',⁷³ frequently challenged his African flock to jettison their belief in the etiological and mystical agency of their ancestors. Moore's sermons were intended to cut links between the living and the dead, links that Africans saw as central to their welfare and to the prevention of death. Like most other Christian evangelists, the missionaries mocked African ancestors as no more than the impotent agents of Satan who could neither induce nor prevent death. In return,

R. J. B. Moore cast death itself as a force that Jesus Christ had single-handedly vanquished with His crucifixion and resurrection. The missionary further held out the promise of everlasting life to all those who abandoned their ancestors and, instead, turned to Christ. Long before Pentecostal denominations in Africa popularized the notion that 'Christ is the answer' to the continent's contemporary woes ranging from the HIV/AIDS pandemic, ailing national airlines and barrenness to other life's difficulties,⁷⁴ the LMS evangelist celebrated Him as the ultimate conqueror of death who could liberate Africans from its clutches and from the evils of industrialism in the Copperbelt.⁷⁵

Other white and black evangelists echoed Moore's sermons elsewhere across the Copperbelt. At Roan Antelope mine in Luanshya, for example, J. Marumo, the black pastor at the African Methodist Episcopal Church, whose evangelical crusade won him the warm affection and material support of the mine's top administrators in the 1930s and 1940s,⁷⁶ earned a reputation among his congregants for 'cursing death'. To this day, former migrants-cum-converts nostalgically remember him as a 'wonderful preacher' whose 'powerful prayers ... [diminished the fear of] death among mines and [thus] called many to turn to Christ'.⁷⁷ Marumo's success as an evangelist apparently lay as much in his propensity to ridicule death as in his animated funeral and burial services, which disconnected dying and death from the destructive agency of the mystical Other. Indeed, it is recalled that the preacher never lost any opportunity during his often well-attended services to

curse death and to laugh at the mourners for wailing ... [Marumo said that] only pagans who lived in the darkness of their ancestors should fear death and wail when they lost a loved one because there was no life for them after death. For those of us called to Christ, [Marumo promised that] we [were] assured

a place of everlasting life in the Kingdom of God in Heaven on the Day of Judgment. Marumo was a wonderful preacher.⁷⁸

The evangelist's endless ministrations did not fail to attract the attention of the miners, who lived in mine compounds saturated with death. For those with the courage to eschew the mystical agency of their ancestors in matters related to mortality, Marumo's discourse of death provided new conceptual weapons with which to confront the fear of perishing away from one's kin and kith. This view finds support in the following popular hymn sang in the Copperbelt's compounds and churches in the 1950s, which promised everlasting life to all those who embraced Christianity.

Friends, we are visitors on earth!
 Let us always remember that death is at hand.
 Let's not forget our Creator, maker of Heaven and earth,
 Who gave us the world.
 Let's magnify the Lord!

The world is like a bone
 From which you gnaw a little bit.
 You will die and leave the world.
 Therefore, men and women, let's not forget!
 Let's remember we will be there on Judgement Day!

Everyone will receive punishment
 According to his wrongdoing.
 There will be [no] reward for wrongdoers on earth
 The poultry farmer looks after the life of his chickens.
 So are our lives. We are looked after by God.⁷⁹

This hymn is quoted at length for it is not just a repository of the beliefs that African converts to Christianity on the

Copperbelt constructed around death, but it also yields insight into how they conceptually sought to tackle mortality. The hymn recognizes the inevitability of death on earth ('Let us always remember that death is at hand' and 'You will die and leave the world'). This in itself reflected the profound fear of mortality that pervaded the mineworkers' daily life on the Copperbelt.⁸⁰ For those who avoided wrongdoing on earth, however, the song promised God's protection from eternal mortality ('The poultry farmer looks after his chickens'), thus liberating them from the fear of the omnipresent spectre of death. Above all, the popular song held out to Christian converts God's gift of everlasting life. For, in the same fashion as a farmer takes care of his poultry, God would restore eternal life to His faithful servants on the Day of Judgement and wreak punishment upon those who did not turn to Christ.

This analysis indicates that African Christians in the Copperbelt came to position the Christian God as the ultimate shield against mortality. But His protection was secured not through traditional authorities or ancestors but the intercession of Jesus Christ.⁸¹ Admittedly, this perception mirrors the influence that the hegemonic evangelical discourse of death came to exert upon the mineworkers' comprehension of death in the Copperbelt. Yet it would be grossly inaccurate to speak of their endorsement of mission discourse as simply an act of humble submission at the feet of triumphant European missionaries. Ample oral and documented evidence from the Copperbelt and elsewhere on the continent indeed shows that local acceptance of the Christian construction of death seldom eroded pre-existing belief in the ability of ancestors to hurl death upon their surviving kin, including those who became Christians. Such evidence indicates that most African converts on the mines continued to believe in the etiological agency and the ability of their ancestors to visit death upon the living.⁸² However, as ancestors were now seen as mere agents of Satan,

their ability to induce death was less formidable since it could be contained through the redeeming power of Christ, a belief that has also been recorded elsewhere in Africa.⁸³

The hymn cited above further supports this analysis, for it indicates that converts on the mines reinterpreted the Christian discourse of death and filtered it through their own existing religious lens and cultural knowledge of death, idioms and grammar. Indeed, such phrases in the hymn as 'The world is like a bone / From which one you gnaw a bit [before you die]' and 'The poultry farmer looks after his chickens' were in fact old pre-Christian idioms appropriated from the popular discourse of mortality through which Bemba-speaking miners understood sickness, death and other misfortunes long before (and after) they had embraced Christianity.⁸⁴ Ironically, it is this very discourse that white missionaries in the Copperbelt dismissed as 'pagan' and hence sought to annihilate.

In sieving the evangelical version of death through their cultural logic, African Christian converts reworked their own knowledge of death and dying. They thus created a new and uniquely African comprehension of mortality with raw materials appropriated from both the Christian and popular discourses of death. In this manner, the converts, wittingly or unwittingly, subverted the mission-driven evangelical cultural agenda aimed at extinguishing 'heathen' beliefs and practices in African society in general and the mine compounds in particular. The conversion of Africans on Copperbelt mines to the Gospel with its construction of death therefore hardly amounted to a teleological trajectory from rejecting the 'pagan' beliefs around mortality to accepting those associated with the new faith. The acceptance of the evangelical version of death by Christian converts arose out of protracted and often very complex processes involving far-reaching intellectual and cultural negotiation.⁸⁵ This view has indeed spawned an expanding research industry on the heels of the publication

in the 1990s of Jean and John Comaroff's hugely influential two-volume study of mission Christianity in nineteenth-century South Africa.⁸⁶

Contesting Chiefly Power and Indirect Rule

The Christian discourse of mortality in the Copperbelt did more than just confound the expectations of missionaries. It also left little space for the exercise of chiefly ritual authority or power over the management of death in the industrial context. For, conceptually, the new discourse pushed ancestral spirits long thought to commune with chiefs over matters of death to the periphery of the converts' eschatological world. In their new version of mortality, the power to protect (or resurrect) believers from death was accessed through Jesus Christ, rather than the ritual intervention of conservative traditional authorities in remote parts of the colony.

It is comprehensible, therefore, that the black mineworkers who turned to Christianity, particularly those with mission education who increasingly monopolized lay leadership in Christian churches and in secular spheres on the copper mines, deeply resented the colonial authorities' efforts to extend to the Copperbelt traditional rulers' political and ritual authority.⁸⁷ Already chafing against the dominance of their conservative chiefs in villages and against the propensity of the European administrators to extend the system of Indirect Rule to the mining towns,⁸⁸ African mission graduates regarded such endeavours as inimical to their own influence and claim to power and authority in urban areas. Thus, it is no wonder that these miners promoted the Christian discourse of mortality to legitimize their opposition against 'traditional' practices of death, which the convert, trading on the language of Christianity, relentlessly denounced as both 'backward' and

'primitive'. Thus they were among the earliest people in the Copperbelt to take to the 'modern' ways of seeing and dealing with death. By the 1950s and 1960s, they buried their loved ones in expensive suits, read, in impeccable English, lengthy biographies of the deceased at gravesides, and placed obituaries in the media, instead of beating 'death drums' to announce the passing away of their relations.⁸⁹ In all these ways, the educated mineworkers signalled their own urban social sophistication and status, distinguishing themselves from illiterate labourers and villagers.

To undermine the political and ritual power of traditional rulers that colonial authorities were so eager to impose upon African workers in urban areas, albeit indirectly, the Christian converts and their leaders vehemently resented the presence of 'tribal' representatives in the mining region. After the Second World War, the mission graduates took advantage of their leadership in the Church, welfare associations and trade unions to de-campaign the system of 'tribal' elders out of the Copperbelt. This ignited a furious struggle for power between the educated elite, who regarded themselves as the natural rulers of the emerging colonial towns, and the elders/court assessors, who with the blessings of European and traditional authorities, saw themselves as the true custodians of African culture in urban centres.⁹⁰ In the 1950s, this struggle manifested itself in the complaint among 'tribal' elders and court assessors that educated miners treated them with contempt or, in their own language, as 'useless', a complaint that came to echo with monotonous familiarity in the ears of colonial functionaries.⁹¹ Matters came to a head in January 1953 when the African Mine Workers Union, in which the mission-trained workers held the top leadership positions and thus constituted the most influential element, overwhelmingly voted the system of 'tribal' elders into extinction on all the mines.⁹² Needless to say, this dealt a lethal blow to colonial and chiefly ambition

to govern Africans in urban localities through 'traditional' institutions or Indirect Rule. It also asserted in no uncertain terms the miners' own claim to cultural autonomy from their unwilling chiefs in villages and from the indifferent colonial state alike.

Seen from this perspective, the altercation that took place in 1956 between Mukuka Nkoloso and the DC in Ndola, with which this paper began, is not too difficult to comprehend. A mission graduate, Nkoloso, was one of those graduates who embraced Christianity. Intentionally or unintentionally, Mukuka Nkoloso participated in the creation of the Christian culture of mortality in the Copperbelt. Nkoloso, from what we know about him, deeply abhorred European domination. And he came to clearly see that the desire by colonial authorities to preserve the African culture of death on the mines was little more than a means by which they sought to reinforce British political hegemony and to buttress indigenous rulers' hold on power at the expense of the younger generation of Africans trained in colonial and mission schools. This was an especially sharp thorn in the side of the local educated elite eager to wrest power from their indifferent black and white rulers.

To do so, Nkoloso and other nationalists needed to dismantle, *inter alia*, chiefly power and influence. They therefore transformed their discourse of death into a discourse of opposition against the authority of their traditional and colonial rulers. It is for this reason that the DC's threat to bring chiefs to Ndola to deport Mukuka Nkoloso from the Copperbelt over his protest against the digging up and relocation of African skeletons from Kabushi Location elicited no more than a defiant retort from the young politician. His infuriated response to the threat was a public statement that traditional authorities, together with their 'tribal' representatives in the Copperbelt, had no right to meddle in matters of death in the mining towns. In that breath, the nationalist contested the

enforcement of their ritual authorities on the mines. In the same breath, he contested the ambition of the colonial state to extend traditional leaders' ritual authority to the Copperbelt, which European rulers saw as indispensable to the survival of British power in general and Indirect Rule in particular. Nkoloso similarly challenged the DC's own authority to interfere in the town dwellers' management of death. But the young freedom fighter paid no small price for his audacity to use death as a site for articulating the nationalist opposition to foreign domination and chiefly power. Before the end of the year, he was unceremoniously removed from the Ndola Urban Advisory Council of which he had been perhaps the most outspoken member.⁹³

Besides putting white authorities and the chiefs' efforts to extend to the Copperbelt the system of Indirect Rule to an ignominious death, Christian converts and miners on the Copperbelt further crafted socially inclusive ritual practices around death. An informant recalled that when Copperbelt Christian families were bereaved in the 1950s and 1960s, fellow congregants, irrespective of their ethnic background, came together to share their grief. Female congregants went around the market to collect contributions of foodstuffs, which they later cooked to feed mourners. Meanwhile, male converts kept vigil outside the funeral house throughout the mourning period; they also eventually dug the grave and buried the corpse. If the deceased was not a miner, Christian converts donated money to the bereaved home to buy a coffin. Together, they beseeched God to welcome the dead into the kingdom.⁹⁴

These rituals both nullified the colonial meta-narrative discourses that cast Africans as a childlike race incapable of behaving as individuals in the wider society.⁹⁵ In congregations consisting of people from various ethnic, linguistic and cultural backgrounds, the Christian cultural entrepreneurs on the mines jointly composed and wrote funeral songs, including

the one analysed above, which they sang when any of their members were bereaved. Deacons/deaconesses in Protestant churches and catechists or prayer leaders in the Catholic Church, prayed for the sick, the dying and the dead, and, in so doing, usurped the ritual authority and power of their rurally based chiefs. They conducted graveside prayers, and collected donations of money and foodstuffs in the compounds to feed the mourners. They shared their grief across ethnic lines in times of bereavement. And finally they reworked and transformed inter-clan joking relationships into cross-ethnic relationships. Thus, people such as the Bemba and Ngoni, whose ancestors had fought pitched battles in the previous centuries, freely joked with each other at funerals where they also staged mock battle – the washing and preparation of the corpse for burial falling on the shoulders of the opposite joking partners.⁹⁶

It is noteworthy that traditional authorities hardly played any meaningful role in the construction of the inter-ethnic culture of mortality that emerged in the mining province. Neither did the converts consult them for permission to announce death when it occurred in mine compounds, and nor did they beat the ‘death drum’.⁹⁷ Combined, the urban death rites that the converts crafted are an apt testimony to their own work of cultural imagination and entrepreneurship. Their new culture of death enabled them to cope with death away from ‘home’, to claim the right to live and to be buried in town just like any white person, and to defy chiefly authority.⁹⁸ Reinforced by the daily interactions of miners at work and in compounds, their rituals served as the materials for the creation of what Bill Bravman has succinctly described as a ‘domain of commonality’,⁹⁹ in which African converts shared similar beliefs and practices about mortality and internment. Through their death-related practices, the converts forged a sense of ritual community through which

the spirits of the deceased could safely transcend the physical realm and join an all-inclusive Christian meta-physical realm. There, the spirits of the dead – whether Bemba or Bisa, Lozi or Luvale, Ngoni or Lunda – could find eternal rest, without the ritual intervention of backward-looking chiefs or their ‘tribal’ representatives. Moreover, the new culture of death that converts forged became central to the expression and definition of their urban social and identity.

The foregoing remarks are a reminder that miners in the Copperbelt transformed death into a terrain for rethinking their culture as well as their pan-ethnic relationships. As a result, they broadened their interpersonal comprehension of death. This enabled them to embrace the cultural Other within the wider framework of Christianity. Stated differently, the culture of death that Christian congregations manufactured expanded the ritual community within which they were able to come to terms with death far beyond the lineage with its narrow world of the living dead.

Conclusion

Symbolic anthropological literature on rituals of death in Africa is legion. The bulk of this literature places a high premium on the role such rites play with regard to the exercise of power and authority at grassroots level. Such scholarship is certainly crucial to our understanding of the importance of death ceremonies in the exercise of chiefly power and social control at local level. However, this approach largely masks the impact that historical dynamics such as colonialism, Christianity, labour migration and urbanization have exerted upon the African culture of mortality. Thus, this scholarship hardly illuminates what symbolic meanings of death actually signify in real-life contexts. Nor does it explore the significant

changes that historically have taken place in African knowledge of death and management of mortality.

This chapter may read as a corrective to limitations in anthropological studies that project African culture of death as static. The chapter shows that African mineworkers in colonial Zambia's Copperbelt recast their knowledge and practices around death in order to cope with the spectre of death on the mines. It maintains that their new culture of death largely drew its raw materials from Christianity and from their own cross-ethnic daily interactions in mine compounds. Not only did the resultant knowledge with associated practices of death allay fears that pervaded miners' life due the high rates of death in the industrial context, this knowledge also became an important ingredient in their efforts to forge urban identities, to reinvent and consolidate inter-ethnic social relations, and, above all, to contest colonial officials' ambition to rule Africans in urban areas through Indirect Rule. And, as demonstrated in the following chapter, mineworkers further incorporated into their emerging culture of mortality icons of modernity such as suits, cars and money to publicly display their rising socio-economic status after the Second World War. The culture through which people manage death is far from static. Rather, the beliefs and practices that surround mortality are socially constructed and mutate within the crucible of specific socio-economic and political realities.

ENDNOTES: CHAPTER III

1. This narrative is based on Arnold Leonard and Trude Scarlett Epstein Papers, MSS 002, Mandeville Special Collections Library, Geisel Library, University of California, San Diego Box 11, File 7 (Leadership Personalities), 1955–56. I am grateful to Professor Megan Vaughan for drawing my attention to this source. Mukuka Nkoloso's identity is revealed in National Archives of Zambia (hereafter NAZ)/Western Province (WP) 1/1/23, procedure of the minutes of the eighteenth meeting of the Ndola African Urban Advisory Council held in the welfare hall on Thursday, 23 June 1955, at 2.30 p.m. On the same file, minutes of the proceeding of the nineteenth meeting of the Ndola African Urban Advisory Council held in the welfare hall on Thursday, 25 August, 1955 at 2.30 p.m. Nkoloso became a key figure in the African nationalist movement and would, after Zambia's independence in 1964, play a cardinal role in the liberation of southern African colonies still under white minority regimes.
2. I have borrowed the expression 'politics of death' from Matthew D. Esposito, 'The Politics of Death: State Funerals as Rites of Reconciliation in Porfirian Mexico, 1876–1889', *Americas*, 62, 1 (2005), 65–94.
3. See Sandra E. Greene, *Sacred Sites and the Colonial Encounter: A History of Meaning and Memory in Ghana* (Bloomington and Indiana, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002); Andreas Sagner, "'The Abandoned Mother": Aging, Old Age and Missionaries in Early and Mid-Nineteenth-Century South-East Africa', *Journal of African History*, 42, 2 (2001), 173–98; Jan-Bart Gewald,

'Flags, Funerals and Fanfares: Herero and Missionary Contestations of the Acceptable, 1900–1940', *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 15, 1 (2002), 105–17.

4. Classic studies on symbolisms in African rituals include Victor W. Turner, *Drums of Affliction: A Study of the Religious Processes Among the Ndembu of Zambia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969); *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967); *Schism and Continuity in an African Society: A Study of Ndembu Village Life* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1957). Recent symbolic studies include Filip De Boeck, 'The Apocalyptic Interlude: Revealing Death in Kinshasa', *African Studies Review*, 48, 2 (2005), 11–31. In the same issue see Peter Geschiere, 'Funerals and Belonging: Different Patterns in South Cameroon', *African Studies Review*, 48, 2 (2005), 45–64; Susan Drucker-Brown, 'Joking at Death: The Mamprusi Grandparent–Grandchild Joking Relationship', *Man*, 17, 4 (1982) 714–27; Ngwenya Barbara Ntombi, 'Redefining Kin and Family Social Relations: Burial Societies and Emergency Relief in Botswana', *Journal of Social Development in Africa*, 18, 1 (2003), 85–110; Deborah Durham and Frederick Klaitz, 'Funeral and the Public Space of Sentiment in Botswana', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 28, 4 (2002), 776–77. Examples of sociologists who have studied issues relating to death outside Africa include Clive Seale, *Constructing Death: The Sociology of Dying and Bereavement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) and Allan Kellehear, *A Social History of Dying* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
5. For studies that examine how funerals and burials disrupt social relations see Anita Jacobson-Widding, 'Death Rituals as Inversion of Life Structure', in *On the Meaning of Death: Essays on Mortuary Rituals and Eschatological Beliefs*, ed. by S. Cederroth, C. Corhin and J. Lindstrom (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell International, 1988), pp. 137–53; Michelle Gilbert, 'The Sudden Death of a Millionaire: Conversion and

Consensus in a Ghanaian Kingdom', *Africa*, 58, 3 (1988), 291–314, and William Cohen and Elisha S. Atieno Odhiambo, *Burying SM: The Politics of Knowledge and the Sociology of Power in Africa* (London: Heinemann, 1992). For those that emphasize the socially integrative functions of mortuary and funeral rituals see David G. Mandelbaum, 'Social Uses of Funeral Rites', in *Death and Identity*, ed. by Robert Fulton (New York, NY, London and Sidney: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1965), pp. 338–60; Ntombi, 'Redefining Kin'; Geschiere, 'Funerals and Belonging'.

6. Mandelbaum, 'Social Uses of Funeral Rites', p. 338.
7. For studies that point in this direction see Pier M. Larson, 'Austronesian Mortuary Ritual in History: Transformations of Secondary Burial (Famadihana) in Highland Madagascar', *Ethnohistory*, 48, 1–2 (2001), 123–55; Rebekah Lee and Megan Vaughan, 'Death and Dying in the History of Africa Since 1800', *Journal of African History*, 49 (2008), 341–59.
8. For works that take this issue seriously see Jennifer Cole and Karen Middleton, 'Rethinking Ancestors and Colonial Power in Madagascar', *Africa*, 71, 1 (2001), 1–36; Lee and Vaughan, 'Death and Dying'. For an anthropological study whose author is not oblivious to the historicity of funeral and burial practices in Africa see Sjaak van der Geest, 'Funeral for the Living: Conversations with Elderly People in Kwahu, Ghana', *African Studies Review*, 43, 3 (2000), 103–29.
9. This critique is informed by Larson, 'Austronesian Mortuary Ritual in History'.
10. But for studies that stress how the subjects of colonialism in Africa developed Christianity, modern education and other colonial institutions to reshape their culture or to contest European political domination see Derek R. Peterson, *Creative Writing: Translation, Bookkeeping and the Work of Imagination in Colonial Kenya* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2004); Walima T. Kalusa, 'Elders, Young Men, and David Livingstone's "Civilizing

- Mission”: Revisiting the Disintegration of the Kololo Kingdom, 1851–1864’, *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 42, 1 (2009), 55–80; Meredith McKittrick, *To Dwell Secure: Generation, Christianity and Colonialism in Ovamboland* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2002).
11. Among scholars who see dying, death and ceremonies associated with mortality as social constructs are Paivi Hasu, *Desire and Death: History through Ritual Practice in Kilimanjaro*, Transactions of the Finish Anthropological Society, XXII (Helsinki: Suomen Antropologinen Seura, 1999); Thomas Laqueur, ‘Bodies, Death, and Pauper Funerals’, *Representations*, 1 (1983), 109–31; Kellehear, *A Social History of Dying*; Sagner, ‘“The Abandoned Mother”’. For studies that perceive disease and medicine as social constructs see Megan Vaughan, *Curing Their Ills: Colonial Power and African Illness* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991); Walima T. Kalusa, ‘Language, Medical Auxiliaries, and the Re-Interpretation of Missionary Medicine in Colonial Mwinilunga, Zambia, 1922–51’, *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 1, 1 (2007), 57–78.
 12. Greene, *Sacred Sites*; Myron Echenberg, *Black Death, White Medicine: Bubonic Plague and the Politics of Public Health in Colonial Senegal, 1914–1945* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann; Oxford: James Currey; Cape Town: David Philip, 2002).
 13. I borrow the term ‘culture of death’ from Tatjana Buklijas, ‘Cultures of Death and Politics of Corpse Supply: Anatomy in Vienna, 1848–1914’, *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 82, 3 (2008), 570–607.
 14. See J. Clyde Mitchell, ‘The Distribution of African Labour by Area of Origin on the Copper Mines of Northern Rhodesia’, *Rhodes-Livingstone Journal*, 14 (1954), 30–34. For a fuller treatment of the industrial and fiscal politics involved in the opening of the mines on the Copperbelt see Lewis Gann, ‘The Northern Rhodesian Copper Industry and the World of Copper, 1923–1952’, *Rhodes-Livingstone Journal*, 18 (1955),

- 1–18; Richard Hall, *Zambia* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1965), Chapter 8; Elena L. Berger, *Labour, Race and Colonial Rule: The Copperbelt from 1924 to Independence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974). The most recent study that explores the same topic is L. J. Butler, *Copper Empire: Mining and the Colonial State in Northern Rhodesia, c. 1930–64* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and New York, NY: Palgrave and Macmillan, 2007).
15. These figures derive from Cherry Gertzel and Morris Szeftel, 'Politics in an African Urban Setting: The Role of the Copperbelt in the Transition to the One-Party State, 1964–73', in *The Dynamics of the One-Party State in Zambia*, ed. by Cherry Gertzel, Carolyn Baylies and Morris Szeftel (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), pp. 118–62 (p. 119).
 16. Mine Industrial Archives (hereinafter MIA) 10.7.10B, United Missionary Societies, 6 February 1937; Godfrey Wilson, 'Economics of Detribalisation in Northern Rhodesia', Part 1, *Rhodes-Livingstone Journal*, 5 (1968, first published in 1941).
 17. Terence Ranger, 'Power, Religion and Community: The Matobo Case', in *Subaltern Studies VII: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, ed. by Partha Chatterjee and Gyanendra Pandey (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 221–46; see also his 'European Attitudes and African Realities: The Rise and Fall of the Matola Chiefs of South-East Tanzania', *Journal of African History*, 20, 1 (1979).
 18. Ibid.
 19. See J. Clyde Mitchell, 'A Note on the Urbanisation of Africans on the Copperbelt', *Rhodes-Livingstone Journal*, 17 (1970, first published in 1951), 20–27.
 20. These observations have been made by several scholars of labour in southern Africa and beyond, including Charles Perrings, *Black Mineworkers in Central Africa: Industrial Strategies and the Evolution of an African Proletariat in the Copperbelt, 1911–1941* (London: Heinemann, 1979); George Chauncey Jr,

- 'The Locus of Reproduction: Women's Labour in the Zambian Copperbelt, 1927–1953', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 7, 2 (1981), 135–64; Charles van Onselen, *Chibaro: African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia 1900–1933* (London: Pluto Press, 1976); Lisa A. Lindsay, 'Domesticity and Difference: Male Breadwinners, Working Women and Colonial Citizenship in the 1945 Nigerian General Strike', *American Historical Review*, 104, 3 (1999), 783–812.
21. See Jane L. Parpart, "'Where is Your Mother?": Gender, Urban Marriage and Colonial Discourse on the Zambian Copperbelt, 1924–1945', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 27, 2 (1994), 241–71.
 22. Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labour Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 53.
 23. The literature on the 1935 African mineworkers' strike on the Copperbelt is legion. For examples see Ian Henderson, 'Early African Leadership: The Copperbelt Disturbances of 1935 and 1940', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 2, 1 (1975), 83–97; Charles Perrings, 'Consciousness, Conflict and Proletarianization: An Assessment of the Mineworkers' Strike on the Northern Rhodesian Copperbelt', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 4, 1 (1977), 31–51; Charles Perrings, *Black Mineworkers in Central Africa*; Jane L. Parpart, *Labor and Capital on the African Copperbelt* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983).
 24. Arnold Leonard Epstein, *Politics in an Urban African Community* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1958), p. 31.
 25. Ibid.
 26. Helmuth Heisler, *Urbanisation and the Government of Migration: The Inter-Relation of Urban and Rural Life in Zambia* (London: C. Hurst & Company, 1974), pp. 103–07.
 27. On the creation of the system of Tribal Elders and African Urban courts, respectively see F. C. Spearpoint, 'The African

- Native & the Rhodesia Copper Mines', Supplement to *Journal of the Royal African Society*, 36 (1937), pp. 1–56 and Epstein, *Politics in an Urban African Community*.
28. See NAZ/WP 1/2/8, Annual Report: Native Affairs, 1947; Parpart, "Where is Your Mother?"
 29. Ibid.
 30. See Parpart, "Where is Your Mother?"
 31. For examples see Jane L. Parpart, *Labor and Capital*; Henry S. Meebelo, *African Proletarians and Colonial Capitalism: The Origins, Growth, and Struggles of the Zambian Labour Movement to 1964* (Lusaka: Kenneth Kaunda Foundation, 1986).
 32. See Greene, *Sacred Sites*, pp. 72–73.
 33. NAZ/WP 1/2/15, annual report on African affairs for the year 1948. On the same file see annual report on African affairs for 1952, Luanshya district; Epstein, *Politics in an Urban African Community*, p. 37.
 34. See NAZ/WP 1/2/8, annual report on native affair for the years 1947, 1948 and 1949, Mufulira district; see also NAZ/WP 1/2/15, annual report on African affairs for the years 1950, 1951 and 1952, Luanshya district.
 35. For a more detailed and interesting examination of this topic see Carol Summers, 'Giving Orders in Rural Southern Rhodesia: Controversies Over African Authority in Development Programs, 1928–1934', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 31, 2 (1998), 279–300.
 36. There is abundant literature on this topic. See James A. Pritchett, *Friends for Life, Friends for Death: Cohorts and Consciousness Among the Lunda-Ndembu* (Charlottesville, VA and London: University of Virginia Press, 2007); Sagner, "The Abandoned Mother"
 37. Megan Vaughan, "Divine Kings"
 38. Personal observation.
 39. For Turner's works see endnote 5.

40. Wyatt MacGaffey, *Religion and Society in Central Africa: The BaKongo of Lower Zaire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).
41. Vaughan, ““Divine Kings”” impressively questions the degree to which African potentates exercised the ritual power over their subjects’ quotidian life.
42. Interview by author with Andrew Kabanda, Chief, Ndola, 21 August 2008.
43. Interview with Henry Richard Malekani, ex-miner, Ndola, 26 August 2008.
44. *Roan Antelope Mine*, March 16, 1949.
45. Ibid.
46. NAZ/WP, annual report on African affairs for the year 1952, Luanshya.
47. See Parpart, ““Where is your Mother?””.
48. See MIA/KTU, Kitwe District Notebook, 1935–1958.
49. The unfortunate consequence of this policy is that mine and colonial archival documents shed pale light on African ceremonies of death in mine compounds on the Copperbelt.
50. See Lee and Vaughan, ‘Death and Dying’.
51. NAZ/WP 1/2/15, annual report on African affairs for the year 1952, Luanshya.
52. See Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).
53. My insight here derives from Shula Marks, ‘The Microphysics of Power: Mental Nursing in South Africa in the First Half of the Twentieth Century’, in *Psychiatry and Empire*, ed. by Sloan Mahone and Megan Vaughn (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 67–98; Amanda D. Kemp and Robert Trent Vinson, ““Poking Holes in the Sky”: Professor James Thaele, American Negroes and Modernity in 1920s Segregationist South Africa’, *African Studies Review*, 43, 1

- (2000), 141–60; Lynn Schler, ‘Looking Through a Glass of Beer: Alcohol in the Cultural Spaces of Colonial Doula, 1910–1945’, *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 35, 2/3 (2002), 315–34; Jeremy Rich, ‘Troubles at the Office: Clerks, State Authority and Social Conflict in Gabon’, *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 38, 1 (2004), 58–82; Garth A. Myers, ‘Colonial and Postcolonial Modernities in Two African Cities’, *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 37, 2/3 (2003), 328–57; Andrew Roberts, *A History of Zambia* (London, Nairobi, Ibadan and Lusaka: Heinemann, 1976), p. 185.
54. James Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999).
 55. Ronald L. Prain, ‘The Stabilisation of Labour in the Rhodesian Copperbelt’, *African Affairs*, 55, 1 (1956), pp. 305–17. See also Heisler, *Urbanisation*, p. 104.
 56. Heisler, *Urbanisation*.
 57. Walima T. Kalusa, ‘Aspects of African Health in the Mining Industry on the Copperbelt: A Case Study of Roan Antelope Mine, 1920–1964’ (unpublished masters dissertation, University of Zambia, 1994).
 58. A stanza from one of such songs went as follows: *I shall die where I wander / O Mother, O Mother / I shall die where I wander*. See Powdermaker, *Copper Town*, pp. 237–38.
 59. See, for example, Lee and Vaughan, ‘Death and Dying’.
 60. Ibid.; interviews with Protasho Mwansa, ex-miner, Ndola, 21 August 2008; Father Alexander Ngosa, Catholic Priest, Ndola, 21 August 2008.
 61. A similar search for meaning and reappraisal of existing ideas and practices in the context of death in recent days has been engendered by the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Africa. See C. Bawa Yamba, ‘Cosmologies in Turmoil: Witchfinding and AIDS in Chiawa, Zambia’, *Africa*, 67, 2 (1997), 200–23; Felicitas Becker and P. Wenzel Geissler, ‘Introduction:

- Searching for Pathways in a Landscape of Death: Religion and AIDS in East Africa', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 37 (2007), 1–15; Ruth Prince, 'Salvation and Tradition: Configurations of Faith in a Time of Death', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 37 (2007), 84–115.
62. This point is inspired by recent works on the creation of ethnicity in Africa. See Bill Bravman, *Making Ethnic Ways: Communities and their Transformations in Taita, Kenya, 1800–1950* (Portsmouth, NH: Nairobi: EAEP and Oxford: James Currey, 1998); Allen Isaacman and Derek Peterson, 'Making the Chikunda: Military Slavery and Ethnicity in Southern Africa, 1750–1900', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 36, 2 (2003), 257–81.
 63. See Epstein, *Politics in an African Urban Community*, p. 8.
 64. See John V. Taylor and Dorothea Lehmann, *Christians of the Copperbelt: The Growth of the Church in Northern Rhodesia* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1961), p. 34.
 65. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
 66. See MIA 10.7.10B/1, P. J. Smit, Dutch Reformed Church, to General Manager, Roan, 12 August 1930. On the same file see Frank Ayer to Fr Lucian Lelii, Luanshya Catholic Church, 20 March 1934.
 67. MIA 10.7.10B, from Bishop of Northern Rhodesia, 4 February 1937.
 68. MIA 10.7.10B, United Missionary Societies, 6 February 1937 and MIA 10.7.10B, United Missions to the Copperbelt, first annual report, 1936–37. Mine managements and European administrators indicated the Watch Tower and the lack of welfare and education facilities for Africans on the mines as some of the major causes of the 1935 strike. MIA 10.7.10B, Missionary-In-Charge to General Manager, Roan Antelope Copper Mines, 2 January 1936. On the fear of communism in colonial Zambia see on the same file Hugh Lawson, United Society for the Christian Literature, to A. Chester Beatty,

Chairman, Mufulira and Roan Antelope Mines, 28 November 1949.

69. See MIA 10.7.10B, Frank Ayer to Colonel T. E. Robins, British South Africa Company, 5 March 1937; MIA 10.7.10B, Cooperative Work on the African Copperbelt, by Rev. R. J. B. Moore of London Missionary Society, 14 November 1937; MIA 10.7.10B, Assistant Secretary to General Manager, Roan Antelope Mines, 14 November 1946; MIA, c.f. Spearpoint to Manager, 28 July 1949; MIA 10.7.10B, C. W. Sablin, Honourable Treasurer, UMCB, to Assistant Manager, Roan Antelope Mine, 28 July 1949.
70. Taylor and Lehmann, *Christians of the Copperbelt*, p. 44.
71. MIA 10.7.10, G. R. Fraser to Compound Manager, 15 September 1938.
72. See Taylor and Lehmann, *Christians of the Copperbelt*.
73. Ibid., p. 40.
74. The literature on this topic is huge and is still growing. See J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, “‘Christ is the Answer’ – What is the Question?: A Ghana Airways Prayer Vigil and its Implications for Religion, Evil and Public Space’, *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 35, 1 (2005), 93–116; J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, “‘Broken Calabashes and Covenants of Fruitfulness’: Cursing Barrenness in Contemporary African Christianity’, *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 37 (2007), pp. 437–60; Meyer, *Translating the Devil*; Paul Gifford, *African Christianity: Its Public Role* (London: Hurst and Co., 1998); Austin M. Cheyeka, ‘Towards a History of the Charismatic Churches in Post-Colonial Zambia’, in *One Zambia, Many Histories: Towards a History of Post-Colonial Zambia*, ed. by Jan-Bart Gewald, Marja Hinfelaar and Giacomo Macola (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008), pp. 144–63.
75. See MIA 10.7.10B, ‘Cooperative Work on the African Copperbelt’ by Rev. R. J. B. Moore of the London Missionary Society, 14 November 1937.

76. See MIA 10.7.10B, Frank Ayer to Mr J. Marumo, African Methodist Episcopal Church, Luanshya, 5 August 1940. On the same file see J. Marumo to Frank Ayer, 29 July 1940.
77. Interview with Henry Mutale, Christian convert, Ndola, 22 August 2008.
78. Interview with David Banda, Deacon and former migrant, Ndola, 22 August 2008.
79. Popular song among African migrants on the Copperbelt recorded in the 1950s see Powdermaker, *Copper Town*, p. 237.
80. My insight here derives from Peter Wood and Emma Wood, ‘“One Day We Will Sing in God’s Home”: Hymns and Songs Sung in the Anglican Church in North-East Congo (DRC)’, *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 34, 1/2 (2004), 145–80.
81. David Banda, interview cited. Similar views are also expressed in Meyer, *Translating the Devil*, and contributors to *East African Expressions of Christianity*, ed. by Thomas Spear and Isaria N. Kimambo (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1990).
82. Ibid.
83. This analysis is informed by Meyer, *Translating the Devil*, and Spear and Kimambo, *East African Expressions of Christianity*.
84. The author is personally familiar with these proverbs as his mother tongue is Bemba, the language in which the hymn was sung.
85. For a more detailed analysis of how the cultural translations of missionary concepts of medicine into African languages affected popular reception of Christian medicine see Kalusa, ‘Language and the Reinterpretation of Missionary Medicine’.
86. Jean and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa*, I (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991); Jean and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier*, II (Chicago: Chicago

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87. Taylor and Lehmann, *Christians of the Copperbelt*.
88. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
89. On obituaries see Roan Antelope, March 1962.
90. NAZ/WP 1/2/15, annual report on African affairs for the year 1950, Luanshya.
91. NAZ/WP 1/2/21, annual report on African affairs for the year 1952, Mufulira.
92. NAZ/WP 1/2/21, African Personnel Manager, Mufulira Copper Mines, to District Commissioner, Mufulira, 4 January 1953.
93. See NAZ/WP 1/1/23, minutes of the proceedings of the twenty-ninth meeting of the Ndola Urban Advisory Council held in the Main School Hall on Friday, 24 August 1956 at 4.30 p.m. On Nkoloso's opposition to the Federation see NAZ/WP 1/1/23, minutes of the proceedings of the fifteenth

meeting of the Ndola African Urban Advisory Council held in the welfare hall on Thursday, 24 March 1955.

94. Interview by author with Passwell Nyirenda, retired pastor, Kitwe, 22 August 2008.
95. Ranger, 'Power, Religion and Community'.
96. The data on urban rituals of death derives from interviews with Peter Mwila, former migrant, Ndola, 23 August 2008; Stanley Rick Kunda Sando, former miner, 23 August 2008; Edward Kasooma, former miner, Chingola, 24 August 2008; Chola Leonard Chitangala, former miner, Mufulira, 26 August 2006. See also D. M. Boswell, 'Personal Crisis and the Mobilisation of the Social Network', in *Social Network in Urban Situations: Analyses of Personal Relationships in Central African Towns*, ed. by Clyde Mitchell (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1969), pp. 245–96.
97. Chola Leonard Chitangala, interview cited; Paulos Fwanika Banda, former migrant, Ndola, 26 August 2008.
98. This analysis draws its inspiration from Peterson, *Creative Writing*.
99. Bravman, *Making Ethnic Ways*, p. 5; Isaacman and Peterson, 'Making the Chikunda', p. 258.

CHAPTER IV

Corpses, Funerals, Imageries of Modernity and the Making of the African Elite Identity on the Zambian Copperbelt, 1945–1964

Walima T. Kalusa

Introduction

When Donald McDonald Thondoya, an educated employee, died in an accident at the Roan Antelope mine, Luanshya on the Zambian Copperbelt in 1960, his family arranged a memorable elite funeral and burial.¹ They dressed his corpse in an expensive suit complete with well-polished shoes, socks and necktie. Rejecting a coffin provided free of charge by the Rhodesia Selection Trust (RST), the mining company for which he had worked for twelve years, the bereaved family also purchased a costly casket for the corpse. With financial contributions from Thondoya's workmates, relatives and friends, they further hired a hearse from a European undertaker to transport the corpse to the mine cemetery, spurning a lorry in which the company ferried black corpses to the cemetery.² Led by the hearse on the burial day, a large cortège of cars with black and white mourners wound its way from the mortuary to the African Methodist Episcopal Church, of which the deceased had been a staunch member. The procession attracted hundreds of onlookers along the funeral route. Some of them allegedly commented admirably on the exquisite procession with its numerous cars, but others dismissed it as

no more than a means by which the bereaved family 'showed off' their status.³

At the church, six pall-bearers, all drawn from Thondoya's congregation and equally clad in immaculate suits, removed the coffin from the hearse. To the accompaniment of a solemn Christian hymn, they carried the casket into the church and placed it in front of the altar. A church minister then conducted a funeral service in English. This elicited a complaint from some mourners who felt that the use of the language of the empire as a medium of communication during the service was inappropriate. Ignoring their complaint, the clergyman eulogized Donald Thondoya as having been a devout Christian, a loving husband, a hard worker and a dependable community leader. He concluded the eulogy by challenging the congregation to emulate the dead man's values and by imploring the Christian God to admit Thondoya into His heavenly kingdom.⁴

The funeral service over, the pall-bearers placed the coffin at the entrance to the church and invited the funeral attendees to view the corpse. As the mourners reached the coffin, each of them bowed solemnly to the casket, observed a moment of silence in prayer and exited the church. The procession then drove on to the African mine cemetery. There, Gilbert Kasewentha, an educated member of the bereaved family, read a lengthy obituary of the deceased in English. In his speech, Kasewentha stressed Thondoya's educational background, his church membership and the positions he had held at the mine prior to his demise. Kasewentha further thanked both African and European mourners for not just attending the funeral and burial but also contributing money to help the bereaved family.⁵ After the obituary, the church minister conducted the burial service. Committing the corpse to the grave, he exhorted the mourners to remain steadfast in their faith to God, just as Thondoya had been in life. The mourners then returned to the funeral house for refreshments, the cost of which was met

by the financial contributions of family members and other funeral attendees. Finally, a few weeks after burial, Thondoya's family held a memorial service to consecrate a bronze plaque and a headstone placed on the grave. Written on the plaque were his name, and the dates of his birth and death, as well as a biblical scripture.⁶

Donald Thondoya's mortuary rituals raise a host of questions. Why did his family and friends bury him in costly attire and coffin instead of a free casket provided by the RST? Why did they refuse to transport his corpse to the cemetery in the company truck and hire a hearse, presumably at a high cost? Equally, why did the pall-bearers turn out at the funeral and church service in expensive suits? How can we explain why the mourners drove their cars to the church and cemetery instead of walking there on foot, as was more common on the Copperbelt?⁷ Why did the clergyman and Gilbert Kasewentha eulogize Thondoya as an educated man, committed Christian, loving family man and hard worker? And why did the preacher implore God to admit the dead man to His celestial kingdom? Was it necessary to place a plaque and headstone on Thondoya's grave when such memorials seldom adorned African graves? And, lastly, why did some onlookers complain against the use of English in church and others simply dismiss the funeral procession itself as a means of showing off?

Queries of this kind often caught the attention of European authorities and academics concerned with changing urban African culture in British Africa,⁸ and have more recently aroused growing interest in a small but expanding community of scholars of death in the continent in general.⁹ Oblivious to the significance of funerals and symbols of modernity to the construction of African social classes, values, identity and culture, colonial rulers across in Africa dismissed elite funerals such as Thondoya's as too costly, often wondering why their black subjects spent money in such a wasteful way.¹⁰ To colonial

rulers, the incorporation of such icons of modernity as money, hearses, coffins, suits and shoes into local rituals of death was no more than a childish way by which their black subjects consumed imported goods that underlined imperial power and prestige in extra-European settings.¹¹ This apprehension, however, seems to have issued from the widespread belief in imperial ruling hierarchies that the integration of emblems of modernity into 'traditional' cultures of death would merely precipitate 'detribalization'.¹² To white authorities in Africa, this development was as much inimical to the exercise of colonial power as it threatened their own prestige, privileges and status.¹³ Determined to forestall 'detribalization', as shown in the last chapter, European rulers with their academic spokespersons scarcely appreciated how their subjects creatively mobilized corpses and emblems of modernity to negotiate social identities and solidarities, to express their cosmopolitanism, and to distinguish themselves from their own subalterns.

Recent histories have done little to advance our comprehension of the value of death and of the centrality of the symbols of modernity to the (re)creation of social identities in colonial Africa. Most of these works portray the rise of the African elite as largely the consequence of the modernization policies that colonial states pursued in the aftermath of the Second World War. Glossing over indigenous agency *vis-à-vis* the construction of new social identities and culture, they single out Western education, Christianity and the developmentalist agendas that colonial regimes pursued after the war as the most important dynamics behind the rise of the local elite.¹⁴ Persuasive as these works may be, they tell us more about the role of colonizers in the creation of indigenous elite in Africa, rather than that of the elite themselves. But the rise of new social classes on the imperial frontier was an infinitely complex affair that seldom exclusively

occurred on the altar of colonial policies. A drama in which the colonized themselves played a leading role, the making of the African elite and their identity also transpired in myriad other locations, not the least of which were symbolic.

The importance of the symbolic to the making of social classes and elite identity must not be underestimated. For, as Deborah Posel and Pamila Gupta astutely observe, symbolic processes are almost always embedded in the rhythms of social and everyday life, as well as in the exercise of political power.¹⁵ Social classes, along with concomitant cultural identities, attributes and values, can therefore only take on a concrete form if and when they are mediated through symbolic processes.¹⁶ The rise in the Copperbelt of 'progressive' Africans, as educated migrant workers were labelled in colonial parlance, cannot therefore be justifiably abstracted from symbolic forms, including rituals of death.

After a brief exploration of the association between mortuary rituals and social identity, status, culture and power in 'traditional' societies in pre-colonial and colonial Zambia, this chapter attempts to document how self-consciously modern migrants to the Copperbelt deployed corpses, funerals and images of modernity to shape their identity and to celebrate their cosmopolitanism between 1945 and 1964. In contrast to colonizers who dismissed costly African funerals as a wasteful way of spending money, the second section of the chapter, informed by recent scholarship on the association of political symbolism with cultural creation, asserts that the rites of death that school-educated migrants crafted in mine compounds were indispensable to the making and reproduction of their social identity and values.¹⁷ However, as these rites brought into high relief unfolding social inequalities, threatened kinship ties, and blurred racial hierarchies between colonizer and colonized, they were not uncontested.

Mortuary Rituals, Social Identity and Power in 'Traditional' African Society

The societies from which African miners who converged in the Zambian Copperbelt originated had a long history and deeply engrained knowledge of the connection of mortuary ceremonies with social identity, status and power.¹⁸ François Coillard, a missionary under the Paris Evangelical Mission who evangelized in Barotseland in modern Zambia's Western province from 1884 to 1904, recorded that corpses of slaves and of rebels slain in battle among the Lozi were left 'bleaching in the sun'.¹⁹ The amateur ethnographer's account further suggests that while ordinary people were interred with little pomp to mark their lowly birth, their rulers were conversely buried with greater ceremony in tombs shaded by 'magnificent clumps of trees'.²⁰ Each tomb was surrounded by a 'sacred enclosure, formed by beautiful strong reed mats'.²¹ Accessible only to the Lozi paramount chief (*litunga*) and his prime minister (*ngambela*), these burial grounds were not only well tended but sites of memory to which the *litunga* periodically returned to offer his predecessors libations of beer, honey and milk, and, from the nineteenth century, imported beads and cloth.²² The very location of royal burial grounds, the manner in which they were looked after, and the sacrifices of exotic goods at the tombs all signalled the preeminent socio-economic position and power successive *litungas* commanded over their subjects. The mortuary rites around deceased Lozi kings no less lubricated the link between the living and the dead than reinforced the kings' political power, symbolically ensuring the reproduction of that power.²³

Barotseland was not the only region where final rites of passage marked socio-political status, identity and power. Missionaries who traversed the territory north of Barotseland in the nineteenth century noted that whereas Lunda commoners

in the area were buried under the floors of their 'miserable huts', their chiefs were interred on the outskirts of villages amidst drumming, drinking, dancing, feasting and the firing of guns.²⁴ Like elsewhere, these ceremonies put on public parade the socio-economic status and power of Lunda chiefs, the proliferation of guns in the mortuary ordeals denoting the rulers' access to imported goods.

The most irrefutable evidence that death celebrations were inextricably intertwined with social identity and power perhaps derives from the documented funerals and burials of an unnamed Bemba woman and of the Bemba paramount chief Mubanga IX Mwamba, both of whom died a century later. Witnessed by renowned anthropologist Audrey Richards in 1933, the rites of the unknown woman, who passed away in childbirth (*inchetu*), were conspicuous for their colourlessness. Apparently arranged by her close relatives, her death ceremonies were attended almost exclusively by those she had lived with in life and devoid of pomp.²⁵ Weeping was not permitted at the funeral due to her 'bad death', and, as Richards observed somewhat disapprovingly, the poor woman was interred in a hastily improvised coffin at a crossroads.

The woman's bland death rituals contrasted sharply with those of Chitimukulu (paramount chief) Mubanga IX Mwamba, who died in 1946. Not only were his rituals richer in political symbolism but they also lasted much longer. Following the chief's demise at Songolo village in Kasama, his body was embalmed by an expert ritualist (*mulichingwe*) with the help of other embalmers (*bafingo*) for a full year.²⁶ The embalmment itself was accomplished through pouring a specially concocted fluid over the dead body, until the corpse came to look like 'a seed'.²⁷ Only after this process was completed did funeral ceremonies begin in earnest at Songolo. Performed under the direction of senior chief Mwamba, the second-most important ruler after Chitimukulu, the celebrations were attended by virtually all other senior Bemba

royals and their sons. The ceremonies also drew hundreds of mourners, leading singers, musicians and dancers from almost every corner of the Bemba polity.

The period between embalming the corpse and transporting it to Shimwalule – a sacred grove in Chinsali north-east of Kasama where leading Bemba traditional authorities have been interred since the founding of the polity – was dominated by vibrant rituals outside a sacred enclosure (*itembwe*) in which the now-desiccated corpse of Chitimukulu Mubanga lay in state. The ceremonies were punctuated by singing, dancing and the firing of muzzle loaders. On the day of the departure for the sacred grove, *mulichingwe* and other *bafingo* prepared a special ‘cow-skin coffin’ (*umuba*) on top of which they placed a red cloth. As the ritual experts worked on the coffin, the firing of guns, the beating of drums and the wailing of women intensified. So did the dancing of *amalaila*, a war-like dance that celebrated the military prowess of Bemba chiefs of the bygone days.

The rites of death at Songolo reached their feverish peak when the chief embalmer removed the coffin from *itembwe* and officially handed it over to the pall-bearers (*tunyelele*), ‘with their ancient bells tinkling at their waists’.²⁸ Before embarking on a four-day journey to Shimwalule, the pall-bearers placed the coffin on the ground to enable spectators to pay their final respects to the dead chief and to throw offerings of money on the coffin. Led by chiefs’ sons, the mourners then prostrated before the coffin, symbolically renewing their political allegiance and loyalty to the highest Bemba throne. Afterwards, the pall-bearers picked up the coffin and, followed by hundreds of mourners, started off for Shimwalule at a trot. More rituals around the corpse took place along the funeral route as the procession moved from village to village until the pall-bearers reached the sacred grove in Chinsali. There, secretive ceremonies were performed before burial.

If the ignominious rites of the woman who died from *inchetu* constituted what Megan Vaughan describes as a 'non-event',²⁹ signalling the deceased's lowly social position and strained economic circumstances, the animated rites of death of Chitimukulu Mubanga IX Mwamba more than symbolized his elevated social and political standing. The keeping of his corpse in the sacred enclosure, the making of a special coffin for the corpse and the dancing of *amalaila* concretely defined his political office, and that of his predecessors and successors. Performed in symbolic context, these rituals sacralized Chitimukulu's power and office, and those of other senior Bemba rulers. The very presence of the latter at, and their active involvement in, the paramount's funeral demonstrated the high political office past and future Chitimukulus enjoyed within the *Bena Ngandu* (Crocodile) Clan, the dynasty that has historically monopolized power in Lubemba since at least the sixteenth century.

The rituals at Songolo were therefore a potent mark of the political distinction and power of Chitimukulu.³⁰ And, if war memorials have in more recent times been mobilized to consolidate totalitarian regimes,³¹ so were the rituals of the deceased chief indispensable to sanctifying the highest political office in Lubemba, ultimately conferring upon it a large dose of mystique.³² These rituals, therefore, not only rendered religious legitimacy and meaning to the top-most political office in the local administrative hierarchy; they also welded the loyalty of the multitudes of people who witnessed them to the political centre dominated by each Bemba paramount chief.

Corpses and Elite Identity in the Copperbelt

African workers who converged in the Copperbelt after the Second World War were not unaware of the intimate relationship between mortuary celebrations and social identity,

status and power. But the mining area was hardly a space where they could etch intact their 'traditional' mortuary rites, or the social, cultural and ethnic identities that such rites symbolized. With its potent mixture of the traditional and the modern, the Copperbelt called for creating new identities specific to the urban environment. For school-trained Africans, this situation was encouraged by two main factors. First, educated workers made up only a tiny fraction of the workforce and, like other miners, were deeply divided along conflicting historical, ethnic and linguistic lines. Second, since they were generally more skilled and therefore better paid than the bulk of the workers, the former faced animosity from other workers.³³ In the 1950s when school-educated employees generally sided with mine managements in industrial disputes, they collectively came to be perceived in mine compounds as collaborators, or more pejoratively as *bamakobo* ('foul fish').³⁴

Nor were school graduates working on the copper mines insulated from racial discrimination, injustices and other indignities inflicted upon the rest of the black working population. Like labourers, they were until the late 1950s housed in poky one-roomed huts in overcrowded mine compounds, fed on inadequate rations and subjected to lengthy working hours, notwithstanding their education. Determined to keep the African in his place, European employers, too, dismissed educated employees as 'cheeky boys'. It is unsurprising that, in this situation, miners with modern education endeavoured to forge a domain of shared values, beliefs, practices and identity to protect their interests, to set themselves apart from the urban rabble and to convey meaning upon their lives.

Michael O. West and Pius Nyambara have attributed the making of African elite and new ethnic identities in colonial Zimbabwe to Western education and to the adoption of scientific agriculture after the Second World War, respectively.³⁵

Other academics have similarly emphasized the role of Christianity in the construction of colonial and post-colonial identities or sub-identities in Africa.³⁶ While there is much to be said in favour of each of these perspectives, they all obfuscate the symbolic processes via which imperial subjects moulded and played out their new social identities. Educated Africans in colonial towns were not slow to forge a new social identity on the symbolic terrain. This view is endorsed by their endless endeavours to manage the corpses of their loved ones with dignity and decency, to orchestrate expensive mortuary ceremonies and, in return, to demand recognition and respect from other Africans and Europeans alike for such efforts.

A sense of the significance black employees in the Copperbelt attached to the management of corpses may be partly gleaned from spirited debates over the disposal of dead bodies involving African tribal elders and European mine authorities after 1945. Early in 1947, African elders at Mufulira mine accosted the Compound Manager there over the bad condition of the mortuary on the mine, in which dead African bodies were kept before burial. Complaining that the mortuary's roof 'leaked badly', they demanded in vain its immediate repair.³⁷ A year later, their counterparts at the neighbouring Nkana mine took to task the Chief Compound Manager (CCM) over 'the polluted state' in which corpses were interred owing to lack of water at the African mine cemetery. They challenged the official to install water pipes close to the cemetery so that corpses could be washed before interments. Their request, however, fell on deaf ears, igniting a protracted controversy between him and the elders.³⁸ An even more serious altercation erupted between the two parties a few months later when elders discovered that a white doctor had placed a dead dog in the African mortuary.³⁹ Incensed by the desecration of the mortuary, the elders, led by a mine clerk, called for its immediate closure. They further dismissed the CCM's efforts to placate them with

the promise that the desecrated mortuary would be disinfected. Instead, they requested that disciplinary action be taken against the offending doctor.⁴⁰

The crusade to secure what African workers considered appropriate treatment of corpses in mine compounds manifested itself in other ways too. Not long after the altercation surrounding the dead dog at Nkana mine, elders bitterly complained to the African Personnel Manager R. G. Gabbitas at Nchanga mine against the poor quality of the coffins his office issued to bereaved families. The complainants insisted that the coffins 'were not well made' as the wood used in manufacturing them was of very poor quality and often not 'properly planed'. They thus asked his office to provide coffins of higher quality in future.⁴¹ Always with an eye on minimizing expenditure on local labour, Gabbitas, however, rejected out of hand their demand, arguing that improving the quality of coffins would escalate their production costs. But the elders remained undeterred. At a later meeting, they pressed him to provide shrouds for workers killed in mine accidents. He turned down the request too.⁴²

By the 1950s, Western-educated miners in the Copperbelt were chafing over the inability of tribal elders to secure meaningful funeral and burial concessions from indifferent white officials.⁴³ In response, they transformed the African Mine Workers Union (AMWU), the Mines African Salaried Association (MASA), the Urban African Advisory Council (UAAC), and other organizations in which they provided leadership into mouthpieces for voicing their concerns over the management of corpses. At a UAAC meeting held in the commercial town of Ndola on 27 August 1952, for example, A. Mugala, an articulate standard-six graduate, decried the lackadaisical attitude European medical authorities displayed toward African corpses.⁴⁴ His complaint was prompted by the lack of sheets and blankets for covering corpses, the congestion

of dead bodies in mortuaries and the prolonged delays in interring them. Of equal concern to Mugala and other 'progressive' men was the lack of shelters for mourners at mortuaries coupled with the long distances the bereaved had to carry corpses to cemeteries.⁴⁵

Faced with indifference from unsympathetic white authorities, consciously modern migrants increasingly spared neither effort nor cost to procure what they regarded as appropriate apparel, coffins and hearses to dress, transport and inter corpses decently. At a stormy meeting held with Kitwe's District Commissioner at Nkana mine in October 1952, miners demanded that the handcart hitherto used at the mine to convey the African dead to the cemetery be replaced with a 'motorized hearse'. But the DC dismissed their demand as too much in advance of its time. Trading on the language of anthropology, he argued that a motorized hearse would be of no use since African 'funerals walked very slowly' to cemeteries.⁴⁶ His argument, however, convinced few educated African miners, if any. By the 1950s and 1960s, elite leaders in AMWU, MASA and other organizations in the Copperbelt were exerting mounting pressure on mine managements to provide hearses and quality coffins, and to improve roads and bridges leading to cemeteries.⁴⁷ Admittedly, some of the mines in the area had by the latter date reluctantly given in to some of these demands. But the hearses they provided were no more than open trucks and of such poor make that they became infamously known at the mines as *katenga malilo*, or 'harbingers of death'.⁴⁸ Nor was there much improvement in the quality of mine coffins either. It is little wonder, then, that such coffins were mostly used by bereaved labourers who could ill afford to pay for mortuary services offered by European undertakers. Conversely, families with fiscal resources preferred to buy quality coffins and to hire hearses. They thus shunned the inferior funeral and burial services rendered to African workers

by close-fisted mining companies. This enabled surviving educated workers to inter corpses of their loved ones in ways commensurate with elite status.⁴⁹

Academic discourse that projects the corpse as not merely a material object but also a signpost of wider social, economic, political and cultural projects provides a useful analytical framework within which to comprehend the elite's eagerness to routinely engage mine officials over dead bodies and to incur extra costs in managing death.⁵⁰ By ensuring that the corpses of dead relatives and friends were appropriately clad in suits, transported in hired hearses and put to rest in elaborate coffins, educated Africans in the Copperbelt publicly displayed their capacity to procure and to consume goods not easily accessible to the rank and file. They also transformed the corpse itself into a vital signifier of their elevated social standing, sartorial preferences and new values. In their hands, therefore, the corpse became a cultural marker that distinguished the emerging elite from the urban rabble. School-trained workers thus transformed corpses into a means by which they dramatized their own superior social status and celebrated their cosmopolitanism in the mining area.

This analysis no less applies to elite funerals and burials. In the Zambian Copperbelt, elite funerals and burials came to be characterized by two major elements. First, they became sites of conspicuous consumption of manufactured goods, a development enhanced by the influx of Western imports into southern Africa after 1945.⁵¹ Second, and unlike the mortuary ceremonies of unskilled miners, funerals and interments of the elite were as much elaborately organized as they were dominated by educated workers, irrespective of their ethnic, linguistic and cultural backgrounds. These views are exemplified by the funerals of the Reverend Isaac M. Mutubila in Kitwe in 1961 and of two African miners in Luanshya in 1962.⁵²

Mutubila, who was the first African to be elected president of the United Church of Northern Rhodesia in 1959, was awarded an MBE by the Queen of England in the same year for his active role in the provision of social services on the Copperbelt.⁵³ Prior to his death, the clergyman had ministered to miners in several mining towns. By the time he passed away in 1961, he had reportedly become 'one of the most popular and respected personalities' in African elite hierarchies in the Copperbelt.⁵⁴ It was people in such circles who played an important role at his funeral in Kitwe. With his family and congregation, they initiated a fund soon after his death, raising about eighty pounds to meet funeral and burial expenses. With the money, they reportedly purchased one of the most exquisite coffins money could ever buy on the Copperbelt. Like the pall-bearers at Thondoya's funeral with which this paper started, the mourners travelled to the funeral in their own cars, most of the funeral attendees attired in black mourning suits. They also organized a sumptuous feast at the funeral house after the burial that was reportedly attended by the cream of the African elite society.⁵⁵ Remembered as perhaps the most costly African funeral ever seen on the mines, Isaac Mutubila's funeral was remarkable for its lengthy church and burial services, and the lavish headstone and bouquets of flowers mourners placed on his grave. The funeral was as late as 2008 still reminisced as having had an extremely lengthy obituary read by a European preacher who eulogized Mutubila for his outstanding educational achievements, many years of selfless service to his flock and untiring devotion to the Christian church.⁵⁶

The funerals of the two miners who died in Luanshya paled in flamboyance and elegance in comparison to that of the clergyman. However, they were no less dominated by immediate family members, friends and workmates of the deceased. At Nelson Mwanza's funeral in March 1962, his acquaintances

raised eleven pounds to meet funeral expenses and later contributed more money to buy a kerb and headstone for the grave.⁵⁷ The mourners that attended his funeral and burial services were immaculately dressed and drawn from different ethnicities. They also included a few Europeans with whom the deceased had worked at the mine and socially interacted with, at least informally. When Jani Longwani Chihuka died at the same mine, his family and friends, too, organized an elite funeral and burial for him. They purchased an elaborate coffin and headstone, airing funeral and burial announcements over a hired public address system. Dressed in elegant mourning outfits, they also laid wreaths on the grave. Like at the Reverend Mutubila's funeral, a European mourner read Chihuka's obituary during the interment.⁵⁸

The three funerals may have markedly differed in elegance and grandness, yet they were all chiefly organized and attended by educated persons and, more importantly, characterized by a conspicuous display of icons of modernity: money, cars, clothes, coffins, hearses and headstones, etc. Students of early modern history have convincingly demonstrated that European kings appropriated such symbols as clothes, flags and paintings to advance varying social and political agendas. These rulers used the emblems to build their own image, solidify their grip on power and turn their sceptical subjects into pliant citizens.⁵⁹ This perspective is valuable to elucidating why modern-minded migrants integrated images of modernity into their rapidly evolving culture of death in the Copperbelt. Educated workers deployed money, coffins, hearses, modern clothes and other images of modernity to creatively weave a potent ritual system that underpinned their changing social identity. Within that ritual system, the icons of modernity took on what Patrick Harries aptly describes as 'the sanctity of tradition'.⁶⁰ Displayed in church, in funerals and in other symbolic contexts, these icons demonstrated the achievements, and new social and

cultural identity, of the rising African elite, sacralizing and making their status and identity look natural.

In the Copperbelt, the emblems of modernity came to be part of the wider urban culture that educated miners forged and shared with each other across linguistic and ethnic divides. Thus, just as revolutionaries have historically deployed various symbols and festivals to legitimize political action,⁶¹ so did the cultural entrepreneurs of the Copperbelt appropriate modern imageries to constitute their own social class, to reorder their life and to display their new values. Such images enabled them to declare their privileged social status, seek public recognition and distinguish themselves from their own subalterns.⁶² Finally, with plaques and headstones placed on the graves of their loved ones, educated migrants provided themselves with personal memorials, conferring 'social immortality' upon their own dead.⁶³

'Does the Coffin Make a Man?'

Inspired by the association between mortuary rituals and social identity and power in 'traditional' African society, the rites of mortality that schooled African workers, crafted to honour and bury the dead in the Copperbelt, may be read as a creative cultural enterprise that permitted them to socially market their identity, concerns, values and achievements.⁶⁴ But even when these rituals drew educated miners into what Bill Bravman perceptively refers to as a 'domain of commonality', there was little unanimity among the elite and other urbanites over what constituted a decent funeral or burial.⁶⁵ Their rites of death were thus hotly contested not just among the elite themselves but also between them and other segments of the urban community, including labourers, kinsfolk and Europeans alike.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the embers of tensions and disagreements over funerals, which continue to echo in Zambia to this day, sparked a lively debate in African-oriented print media in the Copperbelt.⁶⁶ The conservative-minded elite employed the media to castigate bereaved families who spent too much money on expensive interment apparel, coffins and hearses. Writing in late 1959 in *Nshila* (The Way), a government-owned magazine for 'progressive' Africans a concerned writer wondered why some families unwisely wasted money on coffins and hearses instead of spending it on developing their areas of origin.⁶⁷ A contributor to the *Mufulira Star*, a magazine published by the RST, echoed similar sentiments a year later. The writer questioned the logic of those who shunned free coffins provided by mining companies and bought exorbitant caskets sold by Europeans. 'Does a coffin make a man?' the writer asked rhetorically. Responding to his own question, he counselled readers not to waste money on lavish funerals, maintaining that this robbed bereaved families of resources that could otherwise be wisely spent on feeding children or purchasing new household goods.⁶⁸ But such views rarely went unanswered. For the more consciously modern writers dismissed them on the grounds that well-appointed funerals and interments were indispensable to maintaining the respectability of those who had adopted urban life and abandoned what an African nationalist in Ndola described as 'villagism'.⁶⁹ 'Men like us with our families,' recalled a former smelter attendant at Nkana mine more recently, 'could not be expected to carry our dead in a handcart or bury them in rags. It was necessary to spend money on good coffins in order to bury them decently, and we could *afford* it'.⁷⁰ More sentimental members of the elite justified spending money on elaborate funerals and interments as the best way they could express their love for the dead.⁷¹ As Phyllis Martin argues in relation to the contests surrounding Western apparel in colonial

Brazaville, the controversy over coffins, funerals and burials on the Copperbelt underlined educated Africans' concern to influence urban culture, to assert their leadership and to maintain their privileged positions in a rapidly changing society.⁷²

If the elite reached no consensus over what constituted appropriate mortuary rituals, their new ceremonies of death also drove a wedge between them and their less fortunate fellow miners, kinsmen and women, for these ceremonies deepened rising social differentiation and inequalities among African urbanites. Elite workers allegedly sometimes used death rituals to disengage from their subalterns. Informants still recall that some families preferred to invite to their funeral and burial services only family members, friends and workmates most likely to contribute to funerals, rather than indigent relations who contributed nothing.⁷³ Their funeral/burial celebrations were socially exclusive in other ways too. Dominated by English-speaking mourners turned out in expensive funeral attire, these rituals are said to have been less attractive to illiterate labourers and relatives, who neither spoke English nor shared the values, interests and the educational accomplishments of school graduates. Thus, at such celebrations, the subalterns felt or were made to feel 'out of place'.⁷⁴ The rituals invented by 'progressive' Africans on the mines therefore became a potent means for weakening kinship ties, refining social differences and reordering relationships, and consolidating new ties between educated workers. Unsurprisingly, elite funerals incited the wrath of and earned endless ridicule from the urban rabble.⁷⁵

Lastly, African elite funerals and burials were also roundly condemned by European miners and settlers in the colony, not least because these ordeals masked colonial and racial hierarchies. Conservative-minded settlers deprecated costly African funeral celebrations as no more than childlike

emulation of European funerals by cheeky Africans. They particularly abhorred that some liberal-minded Europeans attended and interacted with blacks at African funerals or other social engagements, dismissing such Europeans as 'Kaffir-lovers'.⁷⁶ Settler opposition to African social practices that drew on Western culture was effectively articulated in the late 1950s by an angry white farmer who berated the Federal Broadcasting Services (FBS) in Lusaka for airing programmes that lauded such elite African practices as church weddings, political debates and, presumably, funerals and burials. The farmer insisted that these radio programmes caused 'irreparable harm' as they built 'up a quite unjustified sense of importance among the native community'. As a panacea, he urged the legislative council in the territory to exert greater control over FBS.⁷⁷

But European condemnation of the death rites of the local elite fell on the deaf ears of educated Africans. In 1954, for example, Gabriel Musumbulwa, a trade union leader on the Copperbelt and future Member of Parliament in the white-dominated Federal Assembly turned the irate farmer's discourse on its head.⁷⁸ The moderate trade unionist insisted that it was the moral responsibility of the colonial state to provide decent funeral services to at least those Africans who, besides being able to pay for them, had adopted 'European social behaviour' and were 'well mannered'. Musumbulwa urged colonial authorities to admit this category of the urban African population to European social spaces like cinema halls and political meetings, and to end racial discrimination against them.⁷⁹ In this way, he reasoned, the authorities would practically demonstrate their commitment to the ideology of racial partnership that theoretically underlined the much despised Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. To Gabriel Musumbulwa, then, the African elite's capacity to pay for decent final rites of passage qualified them for social and

political inclusion into the mainstream of the colonial society.

It is clear from this section of the paper that the funeral and interment ordeals of school-trained African miners gave birth to wide-ranging and irreconcilable debates on the Copperbelt. Not only did the elite themselves often disagree over mortuary rites, but they also vehemently differed from other Africans and Europeans alike in the management of mortality. In these controversies may be discerned the elite's concern to shape the evolving urban cultural, social and political landscape, and to safeguard their more privileged positions in mining towns. Funerals and burials provided the elite with a symbolic means to recast their relationships with kinsmen, distancing themselves from unskilled labourers while also forging inter-ethnic solidarities themselves in a rapidly transforming society. Moreover, to men such as Gabriel Musumbulwa, the fact that educated employees could afford to pay for decent funerals or burials of dead family members and friends entitled them to full citizenship rights in the colonial world, with all the benefits this implied. With funerals in mind, the trade unionist thus mocked and subverted the settler-dominated modernist discourse that denounced elite mortuary celebrations as childish and the colonized as primitive governable Other.⁸⁰

Conclusion

European rulers routinely excoriated expensive death ceremonies orchestrated by their educated colonial subjects in the Zambian Copperbelt after the Second World War as evidence of their childlike imitation of Western consumption, tastes and desires. However, little known to Europeans was how modern-conscious Africans, drawing on pre-existing cultural perceptions of death, social identity and power,

creatively integrated into emerging urban culture such icons of modernity as money, cars, clothes, coffins and hearses to give expression to elite cosmopolitanism. Through their new culture of death, they signalled their own changing social identity and values, and deployed their imaginative labour of cultural creation to refine socio-political relations on the terrain of death. But their efforts to renegotiate relationships and history in this way engendered endless disagreements not just among themselves but also between them and other people, and similar tensions still reverberate in Zambian society today. But if the African elite in the Copperbelt recreated the culture of death to rework their identity and relationships, they also, as the next chapter demonstrates, turned their funerals, burials and cemeteries into a site for contesting colonial domination.

ENDNOTES: CHAPTER IV

1. The narrative on Thondoya's funeral is based on *Roan Antelope*, 29 October 1960 and interviews with Margaret Thondoya, sister of Donald Thondoya, Luanshya, 19 August 2011 and 20 August 2011. For a similar elite African funeral at the same mine see *Roan Antelope*, 17 February 1962, p. 8.
2. Interviews with Passwell Nyirenda, retired pastor, Kitwe, 22 August 2008 and David Banda, ex-migrant, Ndola, 22 August 2008.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. *Roan Antelope*, October 1960, p. 7.
6. Interview with Peter Ndlovu, ex-migrant, Ndola, 21 August 2008.
7. See Peter Harries-Jones, *Freedom and Labour: Mobilization and Political Control on the Zambian Copperbelt* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975), Chapter 4.
8. See, for example, J. Clyde Mitchell and A. L. Epstein, 'Occupational Prestige and Social Status Among Urban Africans in Northern Rhodesia', *Africa*, 29, 1 (1959), 22–40 (p. 31); J. Clyde Mitchell, 'A Note on the Urbanisation of Africans on the Copperbelt', *Rhodes-Livingstone Journal*, 12 (1951), 20–27 and his widely read paper 'The Kalela Dance: Aspects of Social Relationships among Urban Africans in Northern Rhodesia', *Rhodes-Livingstone Papers*, 27 (1956); R. J. B. Moore, *These African Copper Miners*, revised with appendices by A. Sanderlands (London: Livingstone Press, 1948).

9. Such scholars include Kwame Arhin, 'The Economic Implications of Transformations in Akan Funeral Rites', *Africa*, 64, 3 (1994), 307–22; Sjaak van der Geest, 'Funerals for the Living: Conversations with Elderly People in Kwahu, Ghana', *African Studies Review*, 43, 3 (2000), 103–29 and his 'Between Death and Funeral: Mortuaries and the Exploitation of Liminality in Kwahu, Ghana', *Africa*, 76, 4 (2006), 485–501; Marleen de Witte, *Long Live the Dead!: Changing Funeral Celebrations in Asante, Ghana* (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2001); Walima T. Kalusa, 'Death, Christianity and African Miners: Contesting Indirect Rule on the Zambian Copperbelt', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 44, 1 (2011), 89–112.
10. See Peter Geschiere, 'Funerals and Belonging: Different Patterns in South Cameroon', *African Studies Review*, 48, 2 (2005), 45–64 (p. 46). Concerns over the high cost of funerals and burials in Africa continue to elicit comments from anthropologists and historians to this day. See, for an interesting example, Suzanne Gott, '"Onetouch" Quality and "Marriage Silver Cup": Performative Display, Cosmopolitanism, and Marital Poatwa in Kumasi Funerals', *Africa Today*, 54, 2 (2007), 79–106.
11. This point is poignantly made by Phyllis M. Martin, 'Contesting Clothes in Colonial Brazzaville', *Journal of African History*, 35 (1994), 401–26. For more detailed works on African consumption of European goods in colonial contexts see Timothy Burke, *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women: Commoditization, Consumption, and Cleanliness in Modern Zimbabwe* (London: Leicester University Press, 1996); Lynn Schuler, 'Bridewealth, Guns and other Status Symbols: Immigration and Consumption in Colonial Doula', *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 16, 2 (2003), 213–34; Walima T. Kalusa, 'Advertising, Consuming Manufactured Goods and Contracting Colonial Hegemony on the Zambian Copperbelt, 1945–1964', paper presented at Frigilla Lodge, Chisamba, Zambia on 27–29

- August 2010 and at History Seminar, University of Swaziland, 1 September 2010. For related works focusing on areas outside Africa see Nicolas Thomas, *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1991) and Elizabeth A. Perkins, 'The Consumer Frontier: Household Consumption in Early Kentucky', *Journal of American History*, 78, 2 (1991), 486–510.
12. For more details on this topic see Walima T. Kalusa, 'Death, Christianity and African Miners: Contesting Indirect Rule in the Zambian Copperbelt, 1935–1964', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 44, 1 (2011), 89–111.
 13. Ibid.
 14. The literature on these issues is vast. See James Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meaning of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA, and London: University of California Press, 1999); Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labour Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); see also Michael O. West, *The Rise of an African Middle Class: Colonial Zimbabwe, 1898–1965* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002); Pius S. Nyambara, 'Madheruka and Shangwe: Ethnic Identities and the Culture of Modernity in Gokwe, North-Western Zimbabwe, 1963–79', *Journal of African History*, 43 (2002), 287–306; Carol Summers, 'Giving Orders in Rural Southern Rhodesia: Controversies over African Authority in Development Programs, 1928–1934', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 31, 2 (1998), 279–300. See also Linda A. Lindsay, 'Domesticity and Difference: Male Breadwinners, Working Women and Colonial Citizenship in the 1945 Nigerian General Strike', *American Historical Review*, 104, 3 (1999), 783–812.
 15. See Deborah Posel and Pamila Gupta, 'The Life of the Corpse: Framing Reflections and Questions', *African Studies, Special Issue on Life of the Corpse*, 68, 3 (2009), 299–309 (p. 299).

16. Wale Adebani, 'Death, National Memory and the Social Construction of Heroism', *Journal of African History*, 49 (2008), 419–44 (p. 420); see also Chapter VI.
17. An excellent example of this scholarship is the volume edited by Sean Wilentz, *Rites of Power: Symbolism, Ritual and Politics Since the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985).
18. My approach here is informed by Martin, 'Contesting Clothes'.
19. See François Coillard, *On the Threshold of Central Africa 1897: A Record of Twenty Years' Pioneering Among the Barotse of the Upper Zambezi* (London: Frank Cass and Company Ltd, 1971, first published in 1897).
20. *Ibid.*, p. 171.
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Ibid.*; see also Gwyn Prins, 'The Battle for Control of the Camera in Late Nineteenth Century Western Zambia', *African Affairs*, 99, 354 (1990), p. 97. I borrow the phrase 'sites of memory' from Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
23. See also Nantaga Jua, 'The Mortuary Sphere, Privilege and the Politics of Belonging in Contemporary Cameroon', *Africa*, 75, 3 (2005), 325–55.
24. See Frederick Arnot, *Garanganze or Seven Years' Pioneer Mission Work in Central Africa* (London: Frank Cass and Company, 1969, first published in 1889).
25. See Chapter II.
26. The narrative on the funeral of Chitimukulu is based on the eyewitness account of Aaron H. Mwenya, 'The Burial of Chitimukulu Mubanga', *African Affairs*, 46, 183 (1947), 101–04. Aaron H. Mwenya was a Bemba clerk employed at Kasama by the Northern Rhodesia government.

27. For a sophisticated discussion of this issue see Chapter II.
28. Mwenye, 'Burial of Chitimukulu', p. 102.
29. Vaughan, "'Divine Kings'".
30. My insight here derives from Mattia Fumanti, 'Burying E. S.: Educated Elites, Subjectivity and Distinction in Rundu, Namibia', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 33, 3 (2007), 469–83.
31. For fascinating reflections on this topic see Nina Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead: The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1994).
32. My inspiration here derives from Tom Trice, 'Rites of Protest: Populist Funerals in Imperial St. Petersburg, 1876–1878', *Slavic Review*, 60, 1 (2001), 50–74 (p. 52).
33. Interviews with Andrew Peter Ndlovu, ex-migrant, Ndola, 21 August 2008 and Protasho Mwansa, ex-miner, Ndola, 21 August 2008.
34. Ibid.
35. West, *African Middle Class*; Nyambara, 'Ethnic Identities'.
36. For examples see Paul S. Landau, *The Realm of the Word: Language, Gender and Christianity in a Southern African Kingdom* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1995); Derek R. Peterson, *Creative Writing: Translation, Bookkeeping and the Work of Imagination in Colonial Kenya* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2004); *East African Expressions of Christianity*, ed. by Thomas T. Spear and Isaria N. Kimambo (Oxford: James Currey Press, 1999).
37. Mine Industry Archives (hereinafter MIA) 16.2.8D/1, minutes of a tribal representatives (hereafter TRs) meeting held in the meeting room on Thursday, 6 March 1947.
38. MIA 16.2.8D, notes of a meeting of TRs held in the Wusakile compound office on Monday, 10 May 1948. On the same file see notes of a meeting of TRs held in the Wusakile compound office on Monday evening, 12 April 1948.
39. MIA 16.2.8D, notes of a meeting of TRs held in Wusakile compound office on Monday, 9 August 1948, at 5 p.m.

40. Ibid.
41. MIA 16.2.8D/2, notes on the regular meeting of the Nchanga mine TRs held on Monday, 17 July 1950 in the African township recreation hall at 5 p.m.
42. MIA 16.2.8D/2, notes on a regular meeting of the Nchanga Mine TRs held on Monday, 17 January 1949 in the compound recreation hall at 5 p.m.
43. For a discussion on the struggle for power between African elders and educated miners before the system of tribal elders was abolished on the Copperbelt in the early 1950s see Kalusa, Chapter III.
44. See National Archives of Zambia (hereinafter NAZ)/WP 1/1/23, minutes of a meeting of the Ndola African Urban Advisory Council held in the welfare hall on Wednesday, 27 August 1952. On the same file see also minutes of the proceedings of the tenth meeting of the Ndola African Urban Advisory Council held in the welfare hall on Thursday, 16 September 1954 and procedure of the minutes of the eighteenth meeting of the Ndola African Urban Advisory Council held in the welfare hall on 23 June 1955 at 2.30 p.m.
45. Most African mine cemeteries were located on the periphery of mine compounds. NAZ/WP 1/1/23, minutes of a meeting of the Ndola African Urban Advisory Council held in the welfare hall on Wednesday, 8 October 1952. See also MIA 16.2.8D, notes of a meeting TRs held in the Wusakili compound office on Monday, 9 August 1948 at 5 p.m. See also MIA 16.2.8D/1, minutes of a TRs' meeting held in the meeting room on Monday, 3 June 1944; on the same family see minutes of a TRs' meeting held in the meeting room on Thursday, 6 March 1947.
46. MIA 16.2.8D, notes of a meeting with TRs held in the Wusakile meeting room on Monday, 13 October 1952.
47. MIA 10.4.9C, minutes of the eighth meeting of the African Township Advisory Committee held in the conference room

on Monday, 15 April 1957; see also MIA 10.5.9E, minutes of the African Township Advisory Committee held at the African personnel offices, Bancroft Mine Ltd, on 16 September at 2.45 p.m., and the same file, minutes of the Bancroft Mine Township Advisory Committee held at the African personnel offices on Thursday, 21 January 1960.

48. Protasho Mwansa, interview cited.
49. Ibid.
50. See Posel and Gupta, 'The Life of the Corpse', p. 299; in the same issue of the journal see also Deborah Posel, 'The Assassination of Hendrik Verwoerd: The Spectre of the Apartheid's Corpse', 331–50; also Chapter VI.
51. For more details on this matter see Burke, *Lifebuoy Men*.
52. *Roan Antelope*, 27 May 1961, p. 5.
53. Ibid.
54. Ibid.
55. Interview with Monica Bwalya Malama, eyewitness, Kitwe, 21 August 2008.
56. Ibid.
57. *Roan Antelope*, 17 March 1962.
58. *Roan Antelope*, 9 June 1962.
59. See, for example, J. H. Elliot, 'Power and Propaganda in the Spain of Philip IV', in *Rites of Power*, ed. by Sean Wilentz (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), pp. 145–73. In the same volume see Maurice Agulhon, 'Politics, Images, and Symbols in Post-Revolutionary France', pp. 177–205.
60. Patrick Harries, 'Imagery, Symbolism and Tradition in a South African Bantustan: Mangosuthu Buthelezi, Inkatha, and Zulu History', *History and Theory*, 32, 1 (1993), 105–25 (p. 107).
61. This point is informed by Mona Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (Cambridge, MA and

- London: Harvard University Press, 1988); Trice, 'Rites of Protest'; Matthew D. Esposito, 'The Politics of Death: State Funerals as Rites of Reconciliation in Porfirian Mexico, 1876–1889', *Americas*, 62, 1 (1995), 65–94.
62. This analysis is inspired by Agulhon, 'Politics, Images and Symbols', p. 177; Marleen de Witte, 'Money and Death: Funeral Business in Asante, Ghana', *Africa*, 73, 4 (2003), 531–59 (p. 533); Thomas Laqueur, 'Bodies, Death, and Pauper Funerals', *Representations*, 1 (1983), 109–31.
 63. See Samuel K. Bonsu and Russell W. Belk, 'Do Not Go Cheaply into That Good Night: Death-Ritual Consumption in Asante, Ghana', *Journal of Consumer Research*, 30, 1 (2003), 41–55 (p. 42).
 64. This view is influenced by Olatunde Bayo Lawuyi, 'The Social Marketing of the Elites: The Advertised Self in the Obituaries and Congratulations in Some Nigerian Dailies', *Africa*, 61, 2 (1991), 247–63 (p. 248); Jua, 'Mortuary Sphere'; van der Geest, 'Funerals for the Living' and 'Between Death and Funeral'; Robert Levine, 'Gusii Funerals: Meanings of Life and Death in an African Community', *Ethos*, 10, 1 (1982), 26–65 and Gott, "Onetouch" Quality and "Marriage Silver Cup". For similar observations on an area outside Africa see Linda Sun Crowder, 'The Chinese Funerals in San Francisco Chinatown: American Chinese Expressions of Mortuary Ritual Performance', *Journal of American Folklore*, 113, 450 (2000), 451–63.
 65. Bill Bravman, *Making Ethnic Ways: Communities and their Transformations in Taita, Kenya, 1800–1950* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1998), p. 5. See also Allen Isaacman and Derek Peterson, 'Making the Chikunda: Military Slavery and Ethnicity in Southern Africa, 1750–1900', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 36, 2 (2003), 257–81 (p. 258).
 66. Zambian dailies are replete with accounts of raging public contests over the management of death.

67. See *Nshila*, 23 December 1959.
68. *Mufulira Star*, 28 January 1960.
69. NAZ/WP 1/1/23, procedure of the minutes of the eighteenth meeting of Ndola African Urban Advisory Council held in welfare hall on Thursday 23 June 1955 at 2.30 p.m.
70. Interview with Dominic Mutapa, ex-miner, Kitwe, 23 August 2008. The emphasis is mine.
71. Interview with Chanda Katongo, ex-miner, Kitwe, 23 August 2008.
72. Martin, 'Contesting Clothes' poignantly makes this point in her exploration of the contests that Western clothes sparked in colonial Brazzaville.
73. Dominic Mutapa and Chanda Katongo, interviews cited.
74. Ibid.
75. Ibid.
76. Ibid. See also Peter Fraenkel, *Wayaleshi* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1959).
77. See Fraenkel, *Wayaleshi*, p. 21.
78. NAZ/WP 1/1/30, minutes of a meeting of the Luanshya African Urban Advisory Council held in the office of the District Commissioner on 26 January 1954 at 5.30 p.m.
79. Ibid.
80. This view is informed by Amanda D. Kemp and Robert Vinson, "'Poking Holes in the Sky": Professor James Thaele, American Negroes and Modernity in 1920s Segregationist South Africa', *African Studies Review*, 43, 1 (2000), 141–60. See also Allison K. Shutt and Tony King, 'Imperial Rhodesians: The 1953 Rhodes Centenary Exhibition in Southern Rhodesia', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 31, 2 (2005), 357–79.

CHAPTER V

Politics of the Gravesite: Funerals, Nationalism and the Reinvention of the Cemetery on the Zambian Copperbelt

Walima T. Kalusa

Introduction

In early 1962, an unusual funeral/burial procession led by the United National Independence Party (UNIP) snaked its way from the municipal mortuary to the cemetery in Luanshya, a small mining town in the Zambian Copperbelt.¹ Conspicuous at the head of the cortège was a municipal hearse with four coffins of Southern Rhodesians who had died in a road traffic accident. There were also many officials of the nationalist party's Women's Brigade, the Funeral Committee and the choir. Belying the solemnity characteristic of most African death ceremonies, the Women's Brigade 'blocked roads to traffic on the funeral route', brusquely demanding money as a funeral contribution from motorists and other passers-by. The brigade also ensured that the mourners were distributed evenly 'in single file on either side of the hearse', no mean task given that there were no less than fifteen thousand mourners in the procession.² On the other hand, the Funeral Committee gave each mourner a small stick, while the choir endlessly sang of the deceased. Its songs, which apparently attracted more people to join the cortège, ranged from sorrowful dirges to Christian hymns. But more popular were the choir's political

songs imploring Kenneth Kaunda, Simon Kapwepwe and other top UNIP leaders to liberate the country from British colonial hegemony and to secure power from reluctant European settlers.

Arriving at the cemetery, the Women's Brigade divided the mourners according to gender, with women sitting 'on the eastern side of the graves and the men on the western side'.³ The brigade also saw to it that children, hands linked together, stood quietly not too close to the graves. At the same time, Funeral Committee officials, who thoroughly dominated the burial rites in the cemetery, went around collecting more money and the sticks they had earlier given to the mourners. They then invited a clergyman from the Free Church to conduct the burial service. But the UNIP officials gave the churchman little time for prayers. This prompted him to complain against the functionaries' propensity for politicking in the cemetery at the expense of praying adequately for the dead.⁴

UNIP's peculiar cemetery rites reached their climax when the relatives of the dead shared with the chairman of the Funeral Committee the rendering of the obituaries of those about to be interred. In his obituary, the party leader effectively linked the deceased's social conduct and personalities to the party,⁵ even though the dead men seem not to have been UNIP members in their lifetime. After committing the bodies to the graves, the chairman made the final speech thanking the mourners for attending the interments and for their financial contributions toward the cost of the funerals and burials. He also implored them to attend other funerals in future, *irrespective* of the mourners' cultural or ethnic origins. The official warned that UNIP would not accord dignified funerals and burials to families that shunned mortuary ceremonies. Most importantly, he assured the gathering that the spirits of those they had just interred would support UNIP nationalists

in their struggle to liberate the territory from colonial misrule, and to create a new sovereign state.⁶

The extraordinary mortuary rites that the nationalist movement orchestrated in the 1960s and earlier in Luanshya and other Copperbelt towns cast a long shadow on academic scholarship that insists that colonial subjects infused local beliefs and practices surrounding their management of death into burial spaces of European origin. Peter Harries-Jones, an anthropologist who witnessed UNIP's ceremonies of death in the mining area in the 1960s, subscribed to this view. To the anthropologist, these rites were little more than 'traditional rituals' that the party leaders and migrant workers replicated in the urban milieu.⁷ Had UNIP tried to jettison such rituals in the mining area, its leaders, Harries-Jones reasoned, would have been met with 'a storm of protest' from tribal elders,⁸ who saw themselves as the true custodians of indigenous culture of death in urban contexts.⁹ Eager to win the elders' support for the crusade to dismantle colonial power, UNIP therefore merely truncated the rituals 'both in time and the *personae ritualis*', its functionaries taking over the performance of death rites traditionally carried out by the kinsfolk of the deceased in rural areas.¹⁰ Ignoring the capacity of UNIP political entrepreneurs to confer new meanings and uses upon colonial cemeteries, the scholar concluded that the movement's engagement with 'traditional' rituals of death in towns was part of its wider crusade to politicize urban networks of social relations that the party perceived as crucial to mobilizing popular support against imperial domination.

The notion that the subjects of the empire embedded into European-style cemeteries pre-existing cosmologies of death and related practices was perhaps more impressively articulated by historian Sandra Greene in her 2002 study of sacred sites among the Anlo in British Ghana.¹¹ Greene insisted that under the pressure of colonial sanitary regulations, Christianity and

education, the Anlo displaced to European-inspired cemeteries the spiritual meanings and functions they read into their own burial sites. As a sequel, cemeteries in the colony acquired meanings and functions akin to those that the Anlo inscribed upon their own sacred locations of interment. According to Greene, this enabled them to not only apprehend 'native' cemeteries in ways that were culturally familiar but also to subvert the discourse of modernity that underpinned their construction in colonial Ghana.

Sandra Greene's analysis challenges structural functionalist analyses that once portrayed African rituals with their underlying belief systems as vulnerable to the corrosion of colonialism, Christianity, labour migration and urbanization.¹² But her argument is not without a blemish. In insisting that the Anlo etched their knowledge and practices of death upon the modern cemetery, Greene, like Peter Harries-Jones before her, underplayed the capacity of people on the fringes of the Western Empire to (re)invent and infuse new meanings into cemeteries or, indeed, other spaces of empire.¹³ Her analysis thus fundamentally masks the ways in which the colonized reconceptualized cemeteries and funerals to honour and bury their loved ones in urban areas or, indeed, to contest colonial power itself.¹⁴

In sharp contrast to Harries-Jones and Sandra Greene, some academics have demonstrated that cemeteries together with mortuary celebrations have historically been potent sites of socio-cultural and political innovations in societies removed in time and space.¹⁵ Matthew Esposito has illuminated how the unpopular Porfirian regime in nineteenth-century Mexico converted funerals into rituals of reconciliation to secure popular legitimacy.¹⁶ Similarly, Tom Trice convincingly highlighted how the opponents of the tsarist state in Russia mobilized funerary rites to challenge the political monopoly and privileges of the monarchy in the nineteenth century.¹⁷

In the same vein, Elizabeth Buettner showed how former colonizers recently appropriated European cemeteries in post-colonial India to celebrate British sacrifices and achievements in the subcontinent.¹⁸ Closer to home, too, academics are now exploring the ways in which Africans rethought cemeteries to come to terms with the lived realities of colonial rule, labour migration, urbanisation, and, more recently, globalization and transnational migration.¹⁹

This essay draws on some of these insights to explore the significance of funerals and cemeteries to nationalism in the Zambian Copperbelt between 1959 and 1964. Driven by the awareness that funerals and cemeteries are symbolic spaces where rulers and ruled legitimize rival claims to political power and authority,²⁰ the paper questions academic discourse that perceives cemeteries in imperial contexts as sites for cultural conservation where the colonized inscribed their pre-existing knowledge and practices around death.²¹ After a brief exploration of the rise of cemeteries in Victorian Europe in the first section of the paper, the study attempts to analyse the usefulness of UNIP-led funerals to the party's struggle for political power. The second section, based largely on UNIP's gravesite rituals, political orations and songs, illuminates how the movement reinvented the modern cemetery in the Copperbelt to contest Western power and hegemony.

From its onset in late 1959, UNIP faced unremitting repression from the colonial state. To circumvent such persecution, the party extended its anti-colonial struggle beyond the constitutional terrain to the symbolic realm. Within this context, it increasingly articulated its nationalist discourse and mobilized popular support through symbolic political action played out through funerals and graveside rituals in cemeteries on the Copperbelt. UNIP consequently not only populated funerals and cemeteries with new meanings and with multi-ethnic African ancestors but also recruited the

newly dead in the combat to dismantle colonial power. Symbolically, then, UNIP effectively widened the public space on which it contested colonial rule and offered its acolytes an alternative political order.²² In its hands, funerary rites and cemeteries became visible monuments to the nationalist identity.²³

European Cemeteries and Colonial Power

Modern cemeteries trace their origins to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe and have had a chequered history. They were largely the outcome of changing Christian attitudes toward death inspired by the ideals of Enlightenment in the previous century. Such ideals questioned the Latino-Christian belief that burial grounds were spiritual spaces where the living at least symbolically interacted with the dead. This situation generated a growing desire to distance the dead from the living through burying them in cemeteries.²⁴ Cemeteries were in turn popularized in the nineteenth century thanks to an intense public health campaign that linked devastating epidemics that swept across Europe to unhygienic, overcrowded inner-city graveyards controlled by the Church. In Britain, particularly, this campaign was fuelled by such epidemic diseases as cholera, typhus and plague that left prodigious mortality in their trail in urban areas. Public health reformers, the world-famous Edwin Chadwick among them, came to single out particularly insanitary church graveyards and the interment of corpses in shallow graves as a major source of the epidemics.²⁵ This spawned a vigorous campaign to relocate the dead from inner-city church graveyards to the periphery of human settlements.

To insulate urban settlements from disease, states in Europe, prodded by sanitary reformers, enacted far-reaching

interment legislation in the nineteenth century. Under such legislation, burial sites were removed from human habitats and their control taken away from the Church and vested in the state. This 'nationalization' of burial grounds was partly intended to undermine the Church's age-old monopoly over mortuary rituals and associated beliefs, a situation that threatened the authority of clergymen.²⁶ The Church therefore put up stiff resistance against the establishment of state-controlled cemeteries, igniting a protracted power struggle between itself and the state. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, the latter had largely won the battle for control over cemeteries.²⁷ By the second half of the century, cemeteries established on the outskirts of cities and maintained by local authorities had become the norm in Europe.²⁸ Even Church authorities had by that date come to accept them as the final resting place for the faithful, rather than a site where the living communed with the dead. There, Christians could reflect on the meaning of death and reinvigorate their faith, as well as indulge in 'sweet melancholy'.²⁹ To secular authorities and public health officials, on the other hand, cemeteries had come to symbolize a physical space where corpses could no longer pose a threat to the living, and as Heather McCrae observes, a marker of a country's progress, civilization and modernity.³⁰

These sanitized understandings of the cemetery were not lost on European authorities or Christian missionaries in colonies in the twentieth century. Only two generations removed from the establishment of cemeteries in Western Europe, colonizers in Africa saw themselves as agents of the gospel of hygiene and sanitation that earlier underwrote the rise of state-controlled burial grounds in Europe. They were thus not slow to inscribe on their colonial possessions what they perceived as appropriate spaces of managing death. Dismissing the burial practices and related ideologies they

encountered in Africa as both loathsome and/or a grave danger to public health, they enacted legislation that imposed cemeteries upon the colonized. This legislation outlawed intramural burials and the interring of corpses in caves, crevices in anthills, and other undesignated burial spaces.³¹

In colonial Zambia, the drive to supplant existing spaces of interment with Western-style cemeteries gave way to the politics of hygiene. Under successive burial ordinances conceived and nurtured in the womb of Indirect Rule, the cornerstone of British rule in Africa from the 1920s onward, Native Authorities in rural areas were mandated to enact regulations against burial grounds and practices that colonial rulers and missionaries dismissed as either primitive or inimical to public health.³² African chiefs, who constituted the backbone of the Native Authority system, were instead required to establish modern cemeteries in conformity with the ideals of modern hygiene. Like elsewhere in British Africa, the cemeteries had to be located away from villages and sources of domestic water. In the same vein, public and mission schools subsidized by the state were all required to offer lessons in hygiene and sanitation to African pupils.³³ In colonial Zambia, employers of African labour and municipal authorities in urban centres were empowered to enact by-laws governing sanitation and public health. These regulations were subject to the approval of the colonial governor and provided for the establishment of mortuaries and 'native cemeteries', with marked graves and legally regulated depths.³⁴ By the 1950s and 1960s, therefore, most of the African dead in the Copperbelt were interred in cemeteries managed by either mining companies or municipal councils. The companies did not charge any fees for burials, but councils were by the latter date levying ten shillings for each burial in their cemeteries.³⁵

To ensure that local authorities adhered strictly to mortuary regulations, health inspectors in the colony's medical service

periodically inspected cemeteries, with the state retaining the power to issue death certificates to bereaved families.³⁶ In this way, the state hoped that local authorities could effectively enforce sanitary regulations in cemeteries, thereby safeguarding public health. But colonially inspired cemeteries in Africa were intended to do more than protect public health. To solidify the Native Authority system established in the colony in the 1930s, European authorities mandated traditional rulers to fine or even incarcerate those among their subjects that rejected cemeteries and continued to inter their loved ones in undesignated burial spaces.³⁷

Cemeteries were thus no less an instrument for buttressing chiefly power than for altering the African culture of death. Moreover, colonizers also mobilized them to deepen the social gulf between themselves and their subjects. On the Copperbelt, cemeteries remained racially segregated well up to the end of colonial rule. This was but a short step to legitimizing other discriminatory policies that denied subjects of the empire socio-economic and political rights and privileges accorded to European settlers on the colonial frontier.³⁸ Imperial authorities therefore established cemeteries in the area and elsewhere not merely to champion public health or to undermine Church authority – in the Copperbelt, they deployed cemeteries to also emasculate their subjects' culture of mortality and secure Indirect Rule, hence enforcing European racial and cultural hegemony.³⁹

Funerals as Sites for Political Contestation

If the colonizer saw cemeteries as a way to construct or maintain power, there is strong evidence that UNIP converted them into a potent instrument for deconstructing that power. That the party perceived the cemetery as a site for contesting

imperial power became evident in the late 1950s after a group of young nationalist radicals broke away from the African National Congress (ANC) due to intense power wrangles within the latter party. Determined to wrest power from Britain and to dissolve the settler-dominated Central African Federation, the radicals formed the Zambia African National Congress (ZANC) in late 1958. But ZANC was an ill-fated party. Its avowed goal to annihilate colonial rule, its opposition to the infamous Benson constitution, its persistent demands for immediate independence and dismemberment of the Federation earned the party the wrath of the colonial state and white settlers.⁴⁰ Consequently, barely four months after its formation, ZANC was outlawed by the colonial state. The colonial authorities further arrested, imprisoned or detained in remote parts of the country the top brass in the party, including Kenneth Kaunda, Zambia's future president.⁴¹

A few months after the banning of ZANC, radical nationalists who had escaped detention or imprisonment began to meet clandestinely in urban areas to create its successor. Worried that their efforts to resurrect the defunct party in one form or another would be thwarted by the indifferent state, they held meetings at night in 'native cemeteries' in Chilenje and Chibolya compounds in Lusaka as well as in mine and municipal cemeteries in the Copperbelt.⁴² These secret meetings, calculated to circumvent state surveillance and persecution, resulted in the formation of two small political parties. In October 1959, the two parties merged into UNIP, with Kaunda taking over the presidency of the new party upon his release from jail early the following year.⁴³ From the onset, UNIP, like its predecessor, pursued a militant policy calculated to end the Federation and to gain power.

Ironically, then, modern cemeteries that imperial rulers saw as essential to maintaining authority and power over Africans became the very birthplace of an organization whose

avowed object was to annihilate colonialism. However, UNIP faced an uphill task in its quest for political liberation.⁴⁴ Espousing its forerunner's hegemonic and often violent brand of nationalism, the new party was from its early days a target of relentless state repression. Its leaders were routinely denied police permits to hold public rallies, hounded day and night by secret police, and caricatured in settler-controlled print media as half-educated mobsters incapable of governing.⁴⁵ Their public rallies were equally frequently broken up by riot police and their followers jailed, flogged or banished from urban areas, sometimes for such trivial offenses as 'shouting slogans like "FREEDOM NOW"'.⁴⁶ In the Copperbelt, state persecution against UNIP reached its peak in May 1960 when the party's foot soldiers in Ndola killed a white housewife, deepening political polarization between black and white nationalisms in the colony.⁴⁷ In a bid to reconstitute social order, the colonial state proscribed all UNIP branches and meetings in the mining area soon after the infamous murder. It also arrested and imprisoned nearly all leading officials of the party in the province. And a year later, it hanged three UNIP activists alleged to have masterminded the killing of the housewife. With such relentless persecution, the nationalist party's very survival lay in balance and its ability to mobilize popular support was severely compromised.

Writing about mortuary rituals in another context, Tom Trice has perceptively remarked that 'in the absence of more conventional forms of political activity ... rites of passage ... often attract political insurgents who desire ritual's power to effect group solidarity and redefine power relations'.⁴⁸ This observation is applicable to UNIP. Unable to engage in conventional political action due to unremitting state harassment, the party in the Copperbelt resorted to what Trice aptly calls the 'symbolic model of political action'.⁴⁹ In his terms, UNIP took advantage of 'the special, "sacred" time and

space effected by the performance of ... funeral and burial rituals',⁵⁰ increasingly arranging funerals and burials to stir up popular support and, at the same time, circumvent persecution from an unsympathetic colonial regime.

One of the funerals the party organized was that of a three-year-old child who died of measles in Luanshya's Mikomfwa Location in 1963. Upon learning of the child's demise, UNIP functionaries went to great lengths to 'publicize the news' of the child's death in the location. In order to attract as many mourners as possible – and thus demonstrate the party's numerical strength – the Women's Brigade went from house to house, urging UNIP members and non-members alike to attend the funeral. This evidently drew to the funeral house almost all party officials in the town. Notable among them were the branch chairman, the treasurer, and former executive members of the nationalist movement. Non-party members, too, turned up at the funeral in their hundreds, including a tribal elder, female mourners and the relatives of the deceased's parents, some of whom came from other towns in the Copperbelt.⁵¹

UNIP officials did not stop short of inviting mourners to this and many other funerals. At many other funerals across the mining region, they also prepared food for the mourners – and potential converts to the party nationalist ideology. They collected firewood for the wakes, made coffins for the corpses and obtained municipal hearses to transport cadavers to the municipal cemetery.⁵² Indeed, party officials and activists often visited the home of the sick, the dying and the dead. And they raised transport money for indigent families who could not pay for their relatives in rural areas to travel to the Copperbelt to attend funerals. The purpose of all these actions was to enable even poor families to provide 'decent funerals and burials' for their loved ones.⁵³

It is remarkable that although the ultimate goal of the United National Independence Party was to wrest power from

reluctant colonial rulers, the party routinely engaged in such demanding social activities as visiting the sick, feeding mourners, collecting firewood for wakes and, of course, leading funeral and interment processions. These activities may at face value seem to have distracted the nationalist movement from its pursuit for power. But their political significance to the nationalist cause must not be underestimated. Performed virtually daily due to the high morbidity and mortality on the Copperbelt, these activities helped UNIP, in one scholar's terminology, to translate its 'master narratives of nationalism as a whole into more detailed tales of life as ... experienced'⁵⁵ by the masses, without whose support the movement could ill afford to dismantle colonial hegemony. By visiting and taking care of the sick, by feeding mourners, and by granting 'decent funerals and burials' to indigent families, UNIP related its own combat for power to the daily concerns of the masses in mine compounds and locations. Through the provision of these social services, the nationalist movement conferred upon its brand of nationalism what Belinda Bozzoli calls 'a universally recognizable character'.⁵⁶ In this way, it demonstrated its keen regard for the inclusion of the popular masses in the crusade to loosen European grip on power.⁵⁷

Worldwide, state-builders have historically organized funerary rites for illustrious political actors to drum up popular support, to reconcile conflicting political factions, to forge collective unity and solidarity, and, lastly, to legitimize their claim to power.⁵⁸ Yet most of the deceased for whom UNIP organized funerals in the Copperbelt were surprisingly neither political luminaries nor members of the political movement. According to an eyewitness, the majority of them were in fact infants and children, at least two of which were a baby and a three-year-old infant.⁵⁹ Other funerals for non-party members equally stand out. In January 1963, the Women's Brigade arranged a huge funeral for a branch official's son who died

in Chingola, another mining town – even though the deceased himself was not a member of the party.⁶⁰ A few months later, the brigade again orchestrated six major funerals for other non-party followers who had died in a road mishap.⁶¹ A similar UNIP funeral was that of a female visitor to the Copperbelt who died barely a month before Zambia's independence. Although the visitor was apparently neither well known in the area nor a member of the party, the movement, nonetheless, reportedly accorded her a funeral akin to those it organized for dead party officials.⁶² Like the funeral procession with which this paper began, these funerals attracted thousands of mourners from virtually every corner of the Copperbelt and beyond.⁶³

Although the majority of the dead for whom UNIP arranged funerals were neither its acolytes nor died in the freedom struggle, the party always used their funerals to relate their personalities, social conduct and corpses to its political project and vision. At the funerals of the six men already alluded to, for example, the UNIP Funeral Committee projected the dead men as having been good, honest and hard-working people in their lifetime – qualities that the committee urged the mourners to emulate by joining the nationalist party. It was also with the same goal in mind that, when a migrant worker died in a mine accident in Kitwe in 1960, UNIP's branch chairman eulogized him as having been a loving father and husband who, prior to his death, had made his intention to enlist in UNIP known to local party officials.⁶⁴ A year later, the party's praise-singer (*mushika Nyimbo*) in Luanshya similarly portrayed a dead young man as a well-behaved person who would have followed 'his father's promising political career had [the former] not died prematurely'.⁶⁵ When the wife of the head medical orderly died at the African mine hospital in Luanshya, she, too, was eulogized as a mother of 'one of the most respected' families in the mine compound, whose life

and values were presumably worth emulating by the living.⁶⁶ In nationalist party's parlance, such emulation could best manifest itself when the mourners honoured the dead through joining and remaining loyal to UNIP.

Clearly, then, UNIP took advantage of funerary rites to breathe political life and values, as well as nationalist qualities, into the apolitical bodies of the dead and to urge the living to acquire similar values.⁶⁷ In this way, it appropriated the lifeless bodies of the deceased to recruit new followers imbued with nationalist qualities. The dead therefore became useful to the party's efforts to expand its numerical strength, disseminate its nationalist tidings, and bolster the waning momentum of the struggle against colonial misrule. But UNIP did more than just employ the dead to convert new adherents to its brand of nationalism. It also mobilized ceremonies of death to reinvigorate its old members' commitment to the nationalist struggle. Thus, Kenneth Kaunda reportedly lost no opportunity afforded by the performance of funerals and burials to urge fellow leaders to rededicate themselves to the nationalist cause and to recruit as many other followers as possible.⁶⁸

UNIP-led funeral ceremonies in the Copperbelt drew their inspiration from the association of pre-existing African mortuary rituals with political power.⁶⁹ However, in sharp contrast to 'traditional' funerals almost always dominated by the kin and kith of the deceased, the party's funerary rituals were designed to attract all and sundry, irrespective of their diverse linguistic, cultural or ethnic affiliations.⁷⁰ To be sure, the kin of the dead on the Copperbelt continued to celebrate and dominate some mortuary rituals whose roots were undeniably embedded in an indigenous culture of death. However, as Peter Harries-Jones himself admitted, UNIP functionaries kept away from such rituals,⁷¹ and for good reason. Mortuary practices dominated by the kinsmen and women of the dead threatened to solidify kinship and ethnic

solidarities that UNIP leaders deemed inimical to building a powerful unifying organization whose membership transcended narrow kinship or ethnic divides.⁷² It is no surprise, then, that the leaders often reminded their followers that UNIP rituals of mortality in the Copperbelt and, of course, other urban settings were for ‘all the people of Zambia’.⁷³ From this standpoint, UNIP cultural entrepreneurs may be said to have risked alienating the support of conservative-minded tribal elders through crafting novel rites of death that undermined lineage, linguistic and ethnic particularisms.

Reinventing the Cemetery

Beyond inventing new funerary knowledge and practices, UNIP equally reconceptualized modern cemeteries to transform them into a discursive space for challenging imperial power, recruiting new constituents and imagining a new sovereign state. This observation is supported by the graveside bureaucratic rituals, songs and orations that came to characterize burials led by the nationalist movement’s party in ‘native cemeteries’ in the Copperbelt. In its early days, UNIP Funeral Committee officials routinely recorded the names of the dead in ‘a big burial notebook’.⁷⁴ They also assiduously inscribed into it the names and addresses of mourners in the cemetery, as well as the amount of money each of them donated to the bereaved family. The Funeral Committee then called out the names of the mourners, each respondent shouting ‘Zambia’ to acknowledge their presence at the gravesite.⁷⁵ Over time, as the numbers of the mourners attending UNIP burials in the Copperbelt swelled into thousands, however, some of these time-consuming rites became impractical. By 1963, therefore, UNIP placed its burial books at entrances to cemeteries, asking mourners to write in

the books their names and other personal data as they entered or left the cemetery.⁷⁶ The party also reckoned the number of mourners through giving each of them a small stick on the funeral route, as earlier noted. Upon reaching the cemetery, Funeral Committee officials retrieved the sticks and sorted them out into bundles. After counting the bundles and recording the tally in the burial books, the officials announced the tally as the total number of mourners present in the cemetery, the announcement itself reportedly done with much pomp and ceremony.⁷⁷

Analyses that cast record and bookkeeping as bureaucratic rituals that the subjects of the empire appropriated from their colonial masters to contest European power offer a useful model within which to comprehend UNIP's propensity for writing down the names, addresses and monetary contributions of mourners during interments.⁷⁸ As Derek Peterson observes in another context,⁷⁹ keeping records of mourners constituted a significant mobilizing strategy that helped the nationalist movement to create new constituents. 'My wife and I,' recalled a former nationalist, 'joined UNIP in 1960 when our names were written down during the burial of our neighbour in Kansunswa cemetery.' More importantly, UNIP officials used addresses recorded in cemeteries to later reach mourners in mine compounds and locations to invite them to join the party, to attend public meetings and to donate money toward funeral and burial expenses.⁸⁰ From the perspective of the UNIP president himself, these records further enabled the party to keep its 'members in constant and close touch with Party headquarters' in Lusaka.⁸¹ And through them, UNIP political entrepreneurs publicly displayed their familiarity with the administrative procedures of the colonial state, and hence their own ability to govern. The fact that the police regularly raided the houses of UNIP officials and the party headquarters to confiscate records and other documents strongly suggests

that colonial rulers themselves also saw UNIP's creative labour of documentation as crucial to its efforts to mobilize a mass following to undermine their power.⁸²

The significance of the bureaucratic rituals that UNIP executed in cemeteries to its nationalist struggle must not be underestimated. Through documenting the details of those who attended burials, UNIP converted the mourners into patriots, laying claim to their time, resources and loyalty, and, in return, promised them political freedom in a future independent nation. This perspective equally applies to graveside orations that UNIP speakers made at virtually all its burials on the Copperbelt.⁸³ While the speakers generally articulated anti-colonial discourse through burial orations, they were frequently deployed to draw mourners' attention to specific political issues of concern to the party. This is most evident in graveside speeches through which UNIP expressed dissatisfaction with the infamous 1958 Arthur Benson constitution that restricted African franchise, the much-hated white-dominated Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, and the Monckton Commission set up by British government in 1961 to review the Federal constitution.⁸⁴

Equally, the 1962 constitution under which UNIP formed a coalition government with the rival ANC, while the control of the army, the police, aviation and foreign affairs still remained in white hands, became a topical theme in burial orations. Simon Mwansa Kapwepwe, UNIP's Treasurer-General, dealt with this issue at the burial in Mufulira of a UNIP leader murdered in inter-party clashes between cadres of UNIP and ANC in March 1962. Like other speakers at the burial, the future Vice-President of Zambia assured the mourners that neither the killing of UNIP officials nor the formation of the coalition government with ANC would curtail the former party's opposition to the constitution. He vowed that no matter how long it took, the party leaders and followers would continue to de-campaign the constitution until

it was done away with, or amended to give more power to Africans.⁸⁵ His sentiments were echoed by R. Matabishi, the Women's Brigade Regional Secretary, who seems to have organized more mortuary celebrations than any other UNIP functionary in the Copperbelt in the early 1960s. Through her numerous orations and letters to leading officials in the party, she lamented that 'as mothers of the nation', women were 'not contented with the present constitution'. Women, Matabishi continued, would therefore 'not sit down' until the constitution was amended and past wrongs done to Africans by Europeans were rectified.⁸⁶ Plainly, UNIP leaders articulated their opposition to colonial domination through interment orations.

Political songs sung by the choir during funerals and burials perhaps played an even more important role regarding UNIP's mobilizing efforts than graveside orations and bureaucratic rites. Apart from entertaining mourners and assuaging the emotional suffering of the bereaved, the songs throw ample light upon the symbolic meanings that the nationalist movement came to inscribe upon colonial cemeteries. Reportedly sung with gusto, the songs – some of which were composed by Kenneth Kaunda and later recorded by his close political ally Kapasa Makasa – did not merely mock the European perception of cemeteries as a site for quiet contemplation but also reminded mourners of the evils of colonialism (the taxation and exploitation of Africans by Europeans for example), as the following song suggests.⁸⁷

At home [i.e. in villages], inhuman taxation is oppressive
 Here on the Copperbelt, inhuman conditions are repressive
 The black man's life is depressing
 Now where shall we go?⁸⁸

Other political hymns bemoaned the enslavement of Africans during the dark age of the slave trade, the massacres of 'innocent

black people' during the world wars between 1914 and 1945, and their misery, exploitation and oppression under colonial rule.⁸⁹ As Kapasa Makasa and Kaunda correctly remarked, these songs were sung to stir up anti-colonial consciousness, to brace UNIP supporters for the difficult struggle that lay ahead and to bolster the courage of the party leadership.⁹⁰ These themes were particularly embodied in a song that, according to Makasa, 'attained the status of a religious hymn' in UNIP circles.⁹¹

UNIP is my shield
 UNIP is my shield for ever
 Nothing shall I fear at all
 Even though chains of slavery... bind me
 Always shall I remember

Gnashing of teeth and misery
 Is [the] black man's curse indeed
 Shedding of tears and weariness
 These are our daily show

To lead never shall I forsake
 In my own land of birth
 Until I see liberty
 Under [the] black man's own rule.⁹²

The song seems to have attained its religious fervour during the numerous burials of UNIP activists killed in late 1963 in another wave of ANC–UNIP violence in the Copperbelt, where it reverberated across 'native cemeteries'. Sung in the face of mounting tensions between the ANC and UNIP, the song was as much meant to denounce the former political party as to boost the courage of the followers and leaders of the latter party so that they could not relent in their struggle for political independence.

Most significant to this chapter, however, were political hymns in which the UNIP choir invoked the spirits of African migrants and UNIP activists buried in cemeteries on the Copperbelt. During the interments of several party cadres killed in the violence of the early 1960s in Luanshya, the UNIP choir, for instance, sang of ancestors with uncharacteristic solemnity, one of the songs urging the adherents of the party to seek ancestors' succour in the fight for freedom:

My brothers and sisters
 Let us mourn our ancestors buried here [i.e. municipal
 cemetery]
 The owners of Zambia (*Abene ba Zambia*)
 To liberate us
 From the slavery of white rule.⁹³

Similarly, song after song implored ancestors to 'rise up' and liberate Africans from colonialism so that 'all [their] children young and old' could 'rejoice in freedom', and the continent could regain its lost dignity.⁹⁴

A cursory glance at these and other political hymns implies that UNIP simply appropriated 'tribal' ancestors and embedded them in Copperbelt cemeteries to contest colonial rule. Yet matters were more complicated. None of the political movement's songs revealed the ancestors' cultural, ethnic or linguistic backgrounds. To the contrary, the songs referred to all those that UNIP interred – irrespective of their age, gender or ethnic background – as 'the spirits of Zambia' (*imipashi ya bena Zambia*) or, more often, as 'the owners of Zambia' (*Abene ba Zambia*).⁹⁵ This was notwithstanding that in most African societies from which the migrant workers in the Copperbelt originated, infants, children and untitled men and women seldom attained the status of ancestors after death. Among the Bemba, for example, this status was accorded only to individuals with political

influence and others believed to possess innate power to act as intermediaries between the physical and metaphysical realms before they died and became ancestors.⁹⁶ By imagining the newly dead as *Abene ba Zambia*, UNIP stripped them of their narrow ethnic identities and symbolically conferred upon them a much wider national identity, infusing them into the modern cemetery. Put in other words, UNIP not only rethought African ancestors but employed them to sacralize the modern cemetery, thus transforming it into a sacred terrain. As a corollary, the nationalist movement symbolically took hold of colonially inspired cemeteries and, on that sacred terrain, made an uncompromising stand against foreign rule.⁹⁷

This analysis is a vivid reminder that cemeteries and funerals on the Copperbelt were hardly sites for cultural preservation with immutable meanings or functions, as some anthropologists imagined them. In the mining region, cemeteries were malleable spaces that derived their meanings and functions from the shifting needs of the people who established and/or used them.⁹⁸ As Elizabeth Buettner perceptively suggests for cemeteries in British India, the meanings and functions that Africans in the Copperbelt read into colonial cemeteries may best be appreciated within the context of scholarship that perceives material objects as 'social beings'. Like the people who make them, material objects, no less modern cemeteries, possess their own 'biographies charting shifting identities over time'.⁹⁹ Thus, while white colonizers saw cemeteries as a means by which they could undermine the culture of death among their black subjects as well as bolster imperial rule, UNIP endowed them with meanings anathema to colonial domination. Through its songs, its bureaucratic rites and its political orations, the party populated cemeteries with newly created ancestors, used them to mobilize popular opposition to colonial rule and ultimately to reverse settler political supremacy.

Imperial authorities in pre-independent Zambia, like their counterparts in neighbouring Zimbabwe,¹⁰⁰ were not unaware of the importance of UNIP's funerary and cemetery rituals to the anti-imperial project, or, indeed, the threat they posed to settler power and privileges. In a move that lends credence to the view that cemeteries are sites of struggle over which rival socio-political meanings and uses are both articulated and contested,¹⁰¹ the authorities often indicted UNIP funeral and burial gatherings in the Copperbelt in the 1960s as no more than illegal political meetings.¹⁰² It is for this reason that plain cloth officers allegedly attended such gatherings to secretly record the names and speeches of UNIP speakers.¹⁰³ The authorities' awareness of the significance of cemeteries to African nationalism was more vividly expressed by their decision in 1961 to secretly inter in unmarked graves the alleged ringleaders of the murder of Lilian Burton after their execution in Livingstone, Zambia's tourist capital.¹⁰⁴ Needless to say, this decision was prompted by their fear that UNIP would convert the burial ground of its martyred activists into a site of nationalist worship, and hence a visible memorial to the anti-colonial struggle.

Conclusion

Modern cemeteries have had a chequered career. First established in Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to manage rising mortality engendered by debilitating epidemics and to emasculate the power of the Church over the management of death, they were exported to imperial Africa in the last century. In British Africa, however, they became more than a means to manage death. British authorities deployed cemeteries to also transform their subjects' culture of death, to secure the system of Indirect Rule and to buttress

settler power. In this discourse, cemeteries were part and parcel of the wider 'civilizing mission' that dismissed African mortuary belief systems and practices as primitive and therefore in need of reconfiguration to a Western image. This discourse scarcely reckoned with the capacity of the colonized to rethink European-style cemeteries and other colonial spaces.

Ample evidence suggests that on the Copperbelt, UNIP transformed funerals and cemeteries alike into a terrain for recruiting new adherents and waging a relentless campaign against alien misrule. Faced with endless repression from the colonial state, the party transformed funeral rites into a viable site for mobilizing popular classes against colonial oppression and domination. Unlike traditional ceremonies that tended to be the exclusive monopoly of the kinsfolk of the deceased, the party's funerals were all-inclusive, inviting men, women and children to not just mourn and inter the dead but also to become co-patriots in the wider nationalist crusade to end colonial power. At the same time, UNIP used funerary celebrations to infuse the newly dead with political meanings and hence to recruit them in the crusade.

Just as UNIP transformed funerals and burials into sites of anti-colonial agitation emblems, so did the nationalist movement turn the modern cemetery into a bastion of the nationalist struggle. An exploration of the rituals, songs and orations that UNIP activists and leaders performed in cemeteries in the Copperbelt indicates that the party hardly perceived them as merely the final resting place of the dead. To the contrary, such rites open a window on how UNIP symbolically took hold of modern cemeteries to recruit followers and to lay claim to the time and resources needed to banish alien rule and construct a new political order. Cemeteries in the mining area, therefore, became an important monument to the nationalist struggle. So did the killing of Lilian Burton by

UNIP activists on the Copperbelt in 1960. Her murder and how it deepened chasms in rival nationalist projects are the subject of the next chapter.

ENDNOTES: CHAPTER V

1. Much of the narrative on this funeral procession is based on the eyewitness account of Peter Harries-Jones, *Freedom and Labour: Mobilization and Political Control on the Zambian Copperbelt* (New York, NY: St Martin's Press, 1975), Chapter 4.
2. Ibid., p. 103.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p. 111.
5. Ibid., p. 105.
6. Interview with Max Mwendapole, former UNIP branch secretary, Luanshya, 21 August 2008.
7. Harries-Jones, *Freedom and Labour*, p. 102. For similar views see D. M. Boswell, 'Personal Crises and the Mobilisation of the Social Network', in *Social Networks in Urban Situations in Central African Towns*, ed. by Clyde Mitchell (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1969), pp. 245–96.
8. Harries-Jones, *Freedom and Labour*, p. 102.
9. For a fuller treatment of this topic see Chapter III.
10. Harries-Jones, *Freedom and Labour*, p. 102.
11. Sandra E. Greene, *Sacred Sites and the Colonial Encounter: A History of Meaning and Memory in Ghana* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002), Chapter 3.
12. For examples of these works see David G. Mandel, 'Social Uses of Rites', in *Death and Identity*, ed. by Robert Fulton (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1965), pp. 338–60; Victor W. Turner, *Drums of Affliction: A Study of the Religious Processes Among the Ndembu of Zambia* (Oxford: Oxford University

- Press, 1969) and *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967).
13. This point is inspired by Vicente Rafael, *Contracting Colonialism: Translation and Christian Conversion in Tagalog Society Under Early Spanish Rule* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993); Paul S. Landau, *The Realm of the Word: Language, Gender and Christianity in a Southern African Kingdom* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1995); Pier M. Larson, ‘“Capacities and Modes of Thinking”: Intellectual Engagements and Subaltern Hegemony in the Early History of Malagasy Christianity’, *American Historical Review*, 102, 4 (1997), 969–1002.
 14. For recent works pointing in this direction see Chapter VI.
 15. Examples of these scholars include Marleen de Witte, *Long Live the Dead!: Changing Funeral Celebrations in Asante, Ghana* (Amsterdam: Aksant Publishers, 2001); ‘Money and Death: Funeral Business in Asante, Ghana’, *Africa*, 73, 4 (2003), 531–59; Sjaak van der Geest, ‘Between Death and Funeral: Mortuaries and the Exploitation of Liminality in Kwahu, Ghana’, *Africa*, 76, 4 (2006), 485–501; Kwame Arhin, ‘The Economic Implications of Transformations in Akan Funeral Rites’, *Africa*, 64, 3 (1994), 307–22; Pier M. Larson, ‘Austronesian Mortuary Ritual in History: Transformation in Secondary Burial (*Famadihana*) in Highland Madagascar’, *Ethnohistory*, 48, 1 (2001), 124–55; Robert Levine, ‘Gusii Funerals: Meaning of Life and Death in an African Community’, *Ethos*, 10, 1 (1982), 26–65; Peter Geschiere, ‘Funerals and Belonging: Different Patterns in South Central Cameroon’, *African Studies Review*, 48, 2 (2005), 45–64; Barbara Ntombi Ngwenya, ‘Redefining Kin and Family Social Relations: Burial Societies and Emergency Relief in Botswana’, *Journal of Social Development in Africa*, 18, 1 (2003), 85–110; Garrey Michael Dennie, ‘Flames of Race, Ashes of Death: Reinventing Cremation in Johannesburg, 1910–1945’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 29, 1 (2003), 117–92. For an unconvincing

- study that perceives funeral and burial rituals as impervious to change see Augustine Kututera Abasi, 'Lua-lia, The "Fresh Funeral": Founding a House for the Deceased Among the Kasena of North-East Ghana', *Africa*, 65, 3 (1995), 448–75.
16. Matthew D. Esposito, 'The Politics of Death; State Funerals as Rites of Reconciliation in Porfirian Mexico, 1876–1889', *Americas*, 62, 1 (2005), 65–94.
 17. Tom Trice, 'Rites of Protest: Populist Funerals in Imperial St. Petersburg, 1876–1878', *Slavic Review*, 60, 1 (2001), 50–74.
 18. Elizabeth Buettner, 'Cemeteries, Public Memory and the Raj Nostalgia in Postcolonial Britain and India', *History and Memory*, 18, 1 (2006), 5–42.
 19. Good examples here include Jennifer Cole and Karen Middleton, 'Rethinking Ancestors and Colonial Power in Madagascar', *Africa*, 71, 1 (2001), 1–36; see also Rebekah Lee and Megan Vaughan, 'Death and Dying in the History of Africa Since 1800', *Journal of African History*, 49 (2008), 341–59; Larson, 'Austronesian Mortuary Ritual'.
 20. See David Kertzer, *Rituals, Politics and Power* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1988); Tom Trice, 'Rites of Protest'; Nina Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead: The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1994); and Mona Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1988).
 21. My inspiration here derives from Belinda Bozzoli, *Theatres of Struggle and the End of Apartheid* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2004); Chapter IX; Garry Michael Dennie, 'Flames of Race'; A. J. Christopher, 'Segregation and Cemeteries in Port Elizabeth, South Africa', *Geographical Journal*, 161, 1 (1995), 38–46. For similar works focusing on extra-African areas see Brenda S. A. Yeoh, 'The Control of "Sacred" Space: Conflict over the Chinese Burial Grounds in Colonial Singapore, 1880–1930', *Journal of Southeast Asian*

- Studies*, 22, 2 (1991), 282–311; Buettner, ‘Cemeteries, Public Memory and Raj Nostalgia’; Heather L. McCrea, ‘On Sacred Ground: The Church and Burial Rites in Nineteenth-Century Yucatán, Mexico’, *Mexican Studies*, 23, 1 (2007), 33–62; Diane O. Bennett, ‘Bury Me in Second Class: Contested Symbols in a Greek Cemetery’, *Anthropological Quarterly*, 67, 3 Part 2 (1994), 122–34.
22. For penetrating analyses of public space as sites of production of socio-political meanings and action see Deborah Durham and Frederick Klaitz, ‘Funerals and the Public Space of Sentiment in Botswana’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 28, 4 (2002), 777–95 and Nicodemus Fru Awasom, ‘The Emergence of Public Spheres in Colonial Cameroon: The Case of Palm Wine Drinking Joints as *lieux de sociabilité* in Bamenda Township’, *Africa Development*, 35, 1 & 2 (2010), 201–20.
 23. This point is inspired by Garry Dennie, ‘The Standard of Dying: Race, Indigence, and the Disposal of the Dead Body in Johannesburg, 1886–1960’, *African Studies*, 68, 3 (2009), 310–30.
 24. Philippe Aries, *Western Attitudes Towards Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974) and ‘The Reversal of Death: Changes in Attitudes Toward Death in Western Societies’, *American Quarterly*, 26, 5 (1974), 536–60. See also Yeoh, ‘Control of “Sacred” Space’.
 25. See Yeoh, ‘Control of “Sacred” Space’.
 26. For discussion of the issues raised here see Abraham Gilam, ‘The Burial Grounds Controversy between Anglo-Jewry and the Victorian Board of Health, 1850’, *Jewish Social Studies*, 45, 2 (1983), 148–56; see also Yeoh, ‘Control of “Sacred” Space’, 283–84.
 27. For details on this power struggle see Thomas Kselman, ‘Funeral Conflicts in Nineteenth-Century France’, *Comparative*

Studies in Society and History, 30, 2 (1988), 312–32; Heather L. McCrea, ‘On Sacred Ground’.

28. Yeoh, ‘Control of “Sacred” Space’, p. 284.
29. Ibid., and Greene, *Sacred Sites*.
30. McCrae, ‘On Sacred Ground’.
31. See Greene, *Sacred Sites*.
32. See Northern Rhodesia, *Report of the Urban African Services Committee Appointed to Review the Financing of the Services and Amenities Provided for Africans in Urban Areas* (Lusaka: Government Printer, 1961).
33. See Greene, *Sacred Sites*, p. 72.
34. See Zambia National Archives, Kitwe District Notebook, 1935–1958; Mine Industrial Archives (hereafter MIA) 10.8.2C/1, Mine Township, Bylaws, Amendments and Administration, 11 of 1952.
35. Northern Rhodesia, *Report of Urban African Services Committee*, p. 47.
36. MIA 10.8.2C, Luanshya Municipality Annual Report of the Medical Officer of Health on Public Health and Sanitary Conditions of the Municipality of Luanshya for the Year Ending 31 December 1953; MIA 10.5.9E, minutes of the twenty-fourth meeting of the Nchanga Mine African Township Advisory Committee held in the African Personnel Department Committee room on Thursday, 19 November 1959 at 3 p.m.
37. Interview with Andrew Mwamba, Headman, Chinsali, 18 June 2010.
38. See Chapter III.
39. Other instruments of empire included education, medicine and even beer. See Jeremy Rich, ‘Troubles at the Office: Clerks, State Authority, Social Conflict in Gabon’, *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 38, 1 (2004), 58–82; Amanda D. Kemp and Robert Trent Vinson, “‘Poking Holes in the Sky”: Professor James

- Thaele, 'American Negroes and Modernity in the 1920s Segregationist South Africa', *African Studies Review*, 43, 1 (2000), 141–60; Shula Marks, 'The Microphysics of Power: Mental Nursing in South Africa in the First Half of the Twentieth Century', in *Psychiatry and Empire*, ed. by Sloan Mahone and Megan Vaughan (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 67–98; Lyn Schler, 'Looking Through a Glass of Beer: Alcohol in the Cultural Space of Colonial Doula, 1910–1945', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 35, 2–3 (2002), 315–34.
40. For classic studies on these issues see David C. Mulford, *Zambia: The Politics of Independence, 1957–1964* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967).
 41. See Kenneth Kaunda, *Zambia Shall Be Free: An Autobiography* (London, Ibadan and Nairobi: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1962), Chapters 14 and 15.
 42. Interviews with Jeremiah Banda, ex-UNIP activist, Ndola, 19 August 2008; Protashio Mwansa, former miner, Ndola, 21 August 2008; Andrew Mubanga, ex-UNIP activist, Mufulira, 22 August 2008.
 43. See Kaunda, *Zambia Shall Be Free*.
 44. Ibid. The sense of foreboding and despondency that state persecution engendered within UNIP ranks was effectively captured in the following stanza of a popular song sang at UNIP funerals and burials on the Copperbelt in the 1950s and 1960s: *There are warplanes in the air / And enemies on the land / Hunting down the owners of the land / To massacre them / [So that] they may cease talking about the country*. Interviews with Andrew P. Ndlovu, former migrant worker, Ndola, 21 August 2008; Stanley Rick Kunda Sondo, former migrant miner, Ndola, 23 August 2008; Chola L. Chitangala, former migrant miner, Mufulira, 26 August 2008.
 45. See *Northern News*, 10 May 1960, and issues published on 11 May 1960, 14 May 1960 and 26 May 1960.
 46. Kaunda, *Zambia Shall Be Free*, p. 151.

47. *Northern News*, 9 May 1960; Nephas Tembo, *The Lilian Burton Killing: The Famous Trials of Zambian Freedom Fighters* (Lusaka: Apple Books, 1986); Kalusa 'Killing of Lilian Burton'.
48. Trice, 'Rites of Protest', p. 53.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
51. Harries-Jones, *Freedom and Labour*, p. 102.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 106.
53. See UNIPA/UNIP 1/11/22, Grace Chongo to Secretary, Women's Brigade, 26 September 1963.
54. For details on this topic see Walima T. Kalusa, 'Aspects of African Health in the Mining Industry: A Case Study of Roan Antelope Mine, 1920–1964' (unpublished masters thesis, University of Zambia, 1994).
55. Bozzoli, *Theatres of the Struggle*, p. 209
56. *Ibid.*
57. This point is informed by Esposito, 'Politics of Death', p. 69.
58. See Trice, 'Rites of Protest'; Esposito, 'Politics of Death'.
59. Harries-Jones, *Freedom and Labour*, p. 106,
60. UNIPA/UNIP 1/1/22, Ribban Kabale to Secretary, Women's Brigade, 23 January 1963.
61. UNIPA/UNIP 1/1/22, Grace Chongo to the Secretary, Chingola Women's Brigade, 26 October 1963.
62. *Ibid.*
63. UNIPA/UNIP 11/1/34, M. Mumba, Women's Regional Secretary to all Regional Secretaries, 3 July 1964.
64. Andrew Mulenga, interview cited.
65. *Ibid.*
66. See *Roan Antelope*, 17 March 1962.
67. My insight here derives from Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change* (New York,

- NY: Columbia University Press, 1999). See also Esposito, 'Politics of Death'; Trice, 'Rites of Protest'.
68. Interview with Alison Banda, former freedom fighter, Katete, 22 October 2009.
 69. See the last chapter.
 70. See Harries-Jones, *Freedom and Labour*.
 71. Ibid., p. 101.
 72. This point is informed by Larson, 'Austronesian Mortuary Ritual'.
 73. Harries-Jones, *Freedom and Labour*. Zambia was the new name that UNIP conferred upon Northern Rhodesia.
 74. Edward Mwamba Mpundu, former UNIP activist, Luanshya, 20 August 2008.
 75. Andrew Mubanga, interview cited.
 76. Interview with Peter Mutale, ex-UNIP activist, Kitwe, 19 August 2008.
 77. Ibid. See also Harries-Jones, *Freedom and Labour*, pp. 100–01.
 78. See Derek Peterson, *Creative Writing: Translation, Bookkeeping and the Work of Imagination in Colonial Kenya* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2004), Chapter 8.
 79. Ibid., p. 21.
 80. Andrew Mubanga, interview cited.
 81. Kaunda, *Zambia Shall Be Free*, p. 154.
 82. Ibid., p. 106 and p. 121.
 83. Peter Mutale, interview cited.
 84. For details on this topic see Mulford, *Zambia*.
 85. Peter Mutale, interview cited.
 86. UNIPA/UNIP 11/1/20, R. Matabishi, Women's [Brigade] Regional Secretary to Women's [Brigade] Director General, 2 January 1963. See also UNIPA/UNIP 11/1/15, A. Milner, Member of the Legislative Council to the Women's [Brigade] Regional Secretary, 22 April 1963.

87. Kaunda, *Zambia Shall Be Free*; Kapasa Makasa, *Zambia's March to Political Freedom* (Nairobi: Heinemann Educational Books, 1981).
88. Makasa, *Zambia's March*, p. 27.
89. *Ibid.*, pp. 42–43 and pp. 59–60.
90. *Ibid.*, p. 118; Kaunda, *Zambia Shall Be Free*.
91. Makasa, *Zambia's March*, p. 118.
92. *Ibid.*
93. Interview with Forster, Mwamba, ex-UNIP choir member, Luanshya, 18 August 2008. A shorter version of this song (in Bemba) is in Harries-Jones, *Freedom and Labour*, p. 101.
94. Makasa, *Zambia's March*, p. 118.
95. Harries-Jones, *Freedom and Labour*, p. 101.
96. Audrey Isabel Richards, *Land, Labour and Diet in Northern Rhodesia: An Economic Study of the Bemba Tribe* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961) touches on this topic in passing. For a more recent and detailed exploration of the topic see Michael Jindra, 'Christianity and the Proliferation of Ancestors in the Cameroon Grasslands', *Africa*, 75, 3 (2005), 356–77.
97. My insights here derive from Terence Ranger, 'Taking Hold of the Land: Holy Places and Pilgrimages in Twentieth-Century Zimbabwe', *Past and Present*, 117 (1989), 158–94. See also his *Voices from the Rocks: Nature, Culture and History in the Matopo Hills of Zimbabwe* (Harare, Baobab; Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN; and Oxford: James Currey, 1999).
98. This view is informed by Buettner, 'Cemeteries, Public Memory and Raj Nostalgia', pp. 29–30.
99. *Ibid.* See also Nicholas Thomas, *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture and Colonialism in the Pacific* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).
100. In colonial Zimbabwe, Cecil Rhodes attempted to legitimize white settler power over Africans by asking to be interred

in the Matopo Hills, where the bones of Mzilikazi, the founder of Ndebele nation, were buried in the nineteenth century. In this way, he hoped to 'replace the Ndebele king as master of the land', thus spiritually taking hold of African land. Interestingly, it was at the grave of Mzilikazi himself that Zimbabwean nationalists launched their armed confrontation against the settler regime in the twentieth century, with Robert Mugabe, Zimbabwe's future president, threatening to exhume Rhodes' bones and to send them to England. See Ranger, *Voices from Rocks*, pp. 3–4, pp. 30–31 and pp. 209–13.

101. See Buettner, 'Cemeteries, Public Memory and Raj Nostalgia', p. 30; Gilam, 'Burial Grounds Controversy'.
102. See Harries-Jones, *Freedom and Labour*, p. 101.
103. Dominic Sakala, ex-UNIP activist, Mufulira, 22 August 2011 and Kaunda, *Zambia Shall Be Free*.
104. See Tembo, 'Killing Lilian Burton'.

CHAPTER VI

The Killing of Lilian Margaret Burton and Black and White Nationalisms in Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) in the 1960s

Walima T. Kalusa

Introduction

The violent killings of Europeans that marked the nationalist struggle for independence in some parts of Africa in the 1950s and 1960s have long attracted the scrutiny of historians. Most of these academics have been particularly concerned with charting the trajectories of violent African nationalism, the attendant murders of European settlers and Africans alike, and the draconian countermeasures that colonial regimes across the continent frequently employed to safeguard European lives and, of course, imperial hegemony itself.¹ Admittedly, this scholarship has advanced our comprehension of the violent nature of African nationalism and of the impact that inter-racial killings had on the pace of decolonization in Africa. But the architects of this scholarship have seldom thrown light upon how killing sparked by the combat for political freedom shaped conflicting African and European political projects or visions.

If historians have been slow to explore the links between nationalist projects and politically motivated killings, symbolic and political anthropologists have in more recent decades taken a growing interest in the centrality of death and

mortuary rituals in structuring inclusionary/exclusionary politics, not to mention the related questions of citizenship, belonging and cultural identity in contemporary Africa.² Wale Adebani, for example, adroitly highlighted the ways in which the powerful Yoruba elite in western Nigeria in the 1990s appropriated the assassination of a Yoruba military governor by northerners during that country's 1966 *coup d'état* in order to reposition themselves in the endless contests for power against other equally powerful ethnic elite in the country.³ In so doing, the Yoruba elite, Adebani argued, sought to renegotiate the basis of Nigerian citizenship, national solidarity and political identity, as well as the exercise of post-colonial power. William Cohen and Elisha Odhiambo, too, have elegantly explored the myriad ways in which contending interest groups in independent Kenya mobilized the death of a prominent lawyer to interrogate state power, to reorder inter-ethnic politics, to craft new cultural knowledge around the management of death and to reconfigure gender and identity.⁴ Further afield, Matthew Esposito has convincingly demonstrated how the unpopular regime of Porfirio Díaz, which usurped power in nineteenth-century Mexico, employed death with its funerary rituals to secure a measure of political consent and legitimacy from indifferent citizens.⁵

This scholarship aptly attests to the truism that the dead enliven the politics of the living, even in so-called modern societies. This is contrary to the widely held assumption in some academic circles that contemporary societies are free from the clutches of the dead.⁶ That the deceased continue to play a central role in the drama of the politics of the living derives from the fact that human belief systems and allied practices often only take on their 'effective and meaningful dimensions through complex symbolic processes'.⁷ Moreover, death itself is frequently so inextricably embedded in the (de) construction of political projects and visions that it cannot be

justifiably abstracted from the pursuit and exercise of political power, a point that is now not lost on a small but steadily growing number of academic analysts.⁸

This article calls attention to the ways in which the 1960 murder on the Zambian Copperbelt of a white housewife – Lilian Margaret Burton – by African political activists of the United National Independence Party (UNIP) informed white and black nationalisms after her murder. Building upon recent academic debate on the political significance of death and dying,⁹ the article, based mainly on colonial media accounts and the newly opened UNIP archives in Lusaka, asserts that conservative white settlers transformed Mrs Burton's tragic end into a potent symbol around which they sought to solidify their hold on power, to obliterate African nationalist aspirations and to rid themselves of the political overlordship of the Colonial Office.¹⁰ To this end, they mobilized her death to reinvigorate their campaign to undercut the political control of the Colonial Office in London over British Central Africa, which they had long perceived as a major barrier to the attainment of self-rule and, ultimately, a dominion status. Conservative settlers and their political representatives came to see this project as the ultimate weapon they could wield to bolster their own position and thereby roll back the growing tide of black nationalism.

But the settlers' drive to reinforce their supremacy over the death of Lilian Burton backfired. For their efforts not only met resistance from liberal-minded European settlers, but also galvanized African nationalism, emboldening the resolve of the especially radical nationalist elite in the territory to break the chains of colonial rule and settler power. Thus, an unrepentant UNIP intensified its own struggle to annihilate the Federation that underlined European power. Besides deepening political polarization between Africans and Europeans, this struggle for political control degenerated into

very violent politics. This culminated in the 1961 *cha cha cha* campaign during which UNIP activists, mostly in the north-eastern part of the colony, destroyed public schools, health centres, bridges and roads, and the colonial state killed an undisclosed number of UNIP cadres.¹¹

Lilian Burton's murder did not just drive a wedge between black and white nationalisms. It also, as this chapter attempts to demonstrate, deepened political fissures within each of these nationalisms, pitting conservative white settlers against white liberals and moderate black nationalists against black radicals. Apart from widening the gulf between rival nationalist political projects, this situation engendered new conflicting visions within each of these forms of nationalism. While conservative settlers turned Lilian's death into a symbol of political mobilization to thwart the African nationalist agenda, as already intimated, liberal-minded Europeans perceived in her murder a pathway to renegotiate race relations and political identity. To the chagrin of conservative Europeans, white liberals sought to actualize their alternative political vision by granting a qualified franchise to the nascent, yet increasingly important, African middle class, whom they considered to have attained a level of socio-political achievement equal to that of Europeans.

The proponents of the liberal agenda in Northern Rhodesia articulated their vision in terms of multiracial partnership, the ill-defined ideological foundation of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland.¹² Through this ideology, liberal political actors sought to contain the tensions engendered by Lilian Burton's death and to guide African nationalism away from violence and, more significantly, from racial exclusiveness. In so doing, they hoped to safeguard their privileged position against African encroachment without either giving in to UNIP's demands for universal adult suffrage or dismantling the colonial apparatus itself.

Over and above the conflicting white and black interest groups stood colonial authorities in Lusaka and their superiors in London. To white authorities in the colony, as to metropolitan officials in Britain, the killing of Lilian Margaret Burton magnified the danger that African nationalism posed to the existing socio-political order. Determined to restore order, colonial leaders in the territory, with backing from London, pressed into service imperial institutions ranging from the police, the Legislative Council and prisons to the judiciary. The Lilian Burton killing thus became an occasion for European authorities in the colony and their superiors overseas to reconstitute the social order and to shore up their authority. In this way, the authorities cast themselves as the guarantors of peace and of political tranquillity on the periphery of the rapidly disintegrating British Empire.¹³ But their efforts to maintain the status quo in the colony did not go uncontested.

Lilian Burton's Murder in a Historical Context

The seeds of the violence that culminated in the unfortunate death of Lilian Margaret Burton in the early 1960s were planted as far back as the 1920s when European settlers in Southern Rhodesia began to agitate for the amalgamation of their colony with the northern territories of Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia – and these seeds were fertilized by the radicalization of African nationalism after the Second World War. From the 1920s, the quest for amalgamation was driven by the desire of white Southern Rhodesians to exploit Nyasaland's abundant African labour and to gain access to Northern Rhodesia's expanding mineral wealth. But the amalgamation project received lukewarm support from the British Government. Authorities in London saw the unification of the protectorates of Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia with the self-governing

Southern Rhodesia, with its policy of racial segregation, as contrary to the 1930 Passfield Memorandum that, at least theoretically, placed a higher premium on African interests than on those of European settlers. Nor did the notion of amalgamation initially appeal to all settlers in Central Africa. Until after the Second World War, most Europeans in Northern Rhodesia were slow to embrace it as they rightly suspected that their southern neighbours' enthusiasm for a political merger was motivated by the expanding copper wealth in Northern Rhodesia.¹⁴

Although the debate on the possible merger of British Central African colonies was shelved during the war, European settlers revived it after the conclusion of hostilities in Europe. Now led by Southern Rhodesia's Prime Minister Godfrey Huggins and Roy Welensky, Northern Rhodesia's most prominent settler representative in the Legislative Council and relentless opponent of African political advancement, the debate increasingly attracted the attention of whites in the latter colony. This was partly because, by the end of the war, the white population had considerably increased in Northern Rhodesia. The settlers had also become more politicized, more determined to transform Northern Rhodesia into their country and more impatient to wrest mineral rights from the British South Africa Company, which continued to enjoy them after it surrendered political reins to the Colonial Office in 1924.¹⁵ As Europeans in Northern Rhodesia became politicized, they also sought to stifle the growing voice of African nationalism and organized labour, both of which threatened to erode their economic privileges and political power after 1945. To the settlers, federating the colony with the already self-governing Southern Rhodesia therefore became more attractive and even a matter of urgency. In their eyes, self-rule was a stepping stone to wresting dominion status from an unsympathetic British government. This, in turn, would prevent the loss of their economic and political privileges to Africans.

Settler political demands were lubricated by the economic and geopolitical concerns of the Conservative government elected to power in Britain in the early 1950s. Although Conservative authorities in London remained adamantly opposed to the amalgamation of British colonies in Central Africa, they were, nonetheless, more amenable to the notion of federating the colonies in order to keep an eye on political developments and to promote multiracialism in the region. In this manner, metropolitan officials hoped to champion racial harmony, to retain European settlers' loyalty to Britain, and to speed up economic development through regional economic planning, coordination of communication, and through easing the flow of Southern Rhodesian coal to Northern Rhodesia, where it was much in demand in the copper industry.¹⁶

Geopolitically, Conservative authorities in Britain believed that by federating Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland, they could effectively counterbalance the northward expansionist tendencies of the Afrikaner nationalist government in South Africa, which was considered hostile to British interests in Central Africa after their unexpected electoral triumph in 1948.¹⁷ From this standpoint, British rulers sanctioned the creation of the Federation in 1953 in order to create a territory (and economy) in Central Africa strong enough to arrest South African expansionist ambitions. However, as several authors have noted, the creation of the Federation took place above the growing din of African political protest, especially in the two northern protectorates of Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia.¹⁸ Africans there saw the federal project as no more than an expedient means by which Europeans in Central Africa would consolidate their grip on power. For them, the Federation was a means by which the white minority would checkmate African political advancement, alienate more land and enact racist laws akin to those that burdened the life of the colonized in the already self-governing Southern Rhodesia.

The Federal constitutional arrangements that bolstered European settlers' economic and political hegemony and simultaneously disempowered Africans have received considerable scholarly attention, and need not detain us here.¹⁹ What is important is to stress that the imposition of the Federation in 1953 upon unwilling Africans ushered in a decade of what Eugenia Herbert describes as 'the Frankenstein monster of African nationalism'.²⁰ At the centre of the rise of this new brand of nationalism – militant, hegemonic and authoritarian – was the newly rejuvenated African National Congress. Led by Harry Mwaanga Nkumbula, the ANC from the onset dismissed the Federation as a farce. The nationalist movement launched an unprecedented albeit unsuccessful, colony-wide campaign of strikes and boycotts of European-owned businesses for most of the 1950s. The failure of the campaign together with Nkumbula's grudging decision to contest elections under the infamous 1958 Benson constitution, which denied universal suffrage to Africans, resulted in radical elements in the ANC breaking away to form the Zambia National Congress in October 1958, which in turn reconstituted itself as UNIP under the leadership of Kenneth David Kaunda, after ZANC had been banned.²¹

Confronted with settler and Federal authorities' determination to crush African nationalist ambitions and facing unbending opposition from the ANC, UNIP from its inception faced formidable barriers in its drive for power. In response, it elaborated 'an intellectual equivalence between party and national membership', with its leaders portraying themselves as the only true rulers of the nascent nation and their party as the only legitimate embodiment of that nation.²² As expected, UNIP constructed its nationalist discourse around demands for an immediate end to colonial power, dismemberment of the Federation, enfranchisement of Africans through universal adult suffrage and 'Independence by October

1960'. This position left little space for alternative political views. It also provided ideological justification for dismissing rival political parties and their supporters as illegitimate, even as enemies.²³ This in turn legitimized intolerance and the use of violence against UNIP's rivals, both white and black, in spite of Kaunda's avowed policy of non-violence. As a corollary, UNIP's entry into the political arena in the latter part of the 1950s marked the beginning of a more violent and less constitutional phase of African nationalism.²⁴

Lilian Burton's Death as a Symbol of Political Mobilization

UNIP's intolerance combined with its unconstitutional approach to the struggle for power heightened political tensions between African and European nationalists and within the African nationalist movement itself. UNIP and its rivals consequently became locked in a vicious power struggle marked by rising inter-party violence, stone-throwing, arson, muggings and murder, as UNIP sought to both end settler political supremacy and to eclipse ANC influence.

It was within this politically volatile situation that UNIP activists attacked Lilian Burton in Ndola on 8 May 1960, stoning and burning her car with the victim and her two young daughters still inside. Before she died from the burns sustained in the attack, she reportedly implored European settlers across the country not to avenge her misfortune by indiscriminately attacking Africans.²⁵ Her husband Robert Burton echoed the appeal in several heart-rending interviews with the print media after his wife's death. He emphasized that his spouse died as an ardent supporter of African political aspirations. She therefore, the widower emphasized, passed away with no ill feelings toward Africans. Accordingly, he passionately

appealed to both Africans and Europeans in the Federation not to 'use her death for political purposes'.²⁶

In spite of these appeals, the Lilian Burton atrocity soon turned into the centrepiece of a raging political storm involving white settlers, African nationalists, colonial and federal authorities in Central Africa and their superiors in England, deepening the chasm between competing black and white nationalist visions and projects. In a move that lends support to the notion that politically motivated murders committed at times of mounting social tension provoke intense fear, anger and state retribution,²⁷ the reaction of conservative immigrant settlers to the killing of Lilian was a mixture of indignation, revulsion and xenophobia.²⁸ Such sentiments found vivid expression at impromptu European vigilante meetings organized across the Copperbelt in response to the Lilian Burton tragedy. These sentiments were vented in a stream of incensed media accounts published mostly in *Northern News*, a pro-settler tabloid controlled by Roy Welensky, the Federation's Prime Minister since 1956. Barely two days after the attack on Lilian, the paper gave wide publicity to a rowdy meeting of more than two thousand Europeans in Kitwe on the Copperbelt at which Territorial Minister Rodney Malcomson and Commerce Minister Frank Owen denounced UNIP activists behind the atrocity as heartless 'rats' and murderers. Both ministers not only endorsed their listeners' clamour for 'arms' and 'action' against UNIP nationalists, they assured them that Welensky would exterminate the 'rats' if the colony's Governor, Sir Evelyn Hone, took no action against them.²⁹

Similar sentiments were echoed by the ruling settler-dominated United Federal Party (UFP) which called for the immediate dismissal or resignation of the Governor himself after the attack on Lilian Burton. Accusing him of countenancing UNIP 'hooliganism' and being too weak to deal with UNIP 'terrorists' behind the attack of an 'innocent housewife and

mother', the UFP called upon the Federal government in Salisbury to quell African nationalist activities and to safeguard European lives and property. The call for the instant dismissal of Sir Evelyn Hone was taken up by the executive branches of the European Mineworkers Union (EMWU) throughout the Copperbelt. The union's branch officials in Ndola and Luanshya, for instance, accused the Governor of an inability to contain 'primitive savagery'.³⁰ They also caricatured the killers of Lilian Burton as simple-minded, 'half-savage mobsters', whose leaders were ill educated, 'vociferous and clamorous individuals'.³¹ The political activities of UNIP and its leaders could, the officials insisted, lead to nothing but more bloodshed and chaos.

As a preventive measure, conservative-minded Europeans called for extreme punitive actions against the party to contain radical African nationalism, urging the territorial and federal governments to meet UNIP violence with violence.³² In addition to imploring the colonial state to impose maximum penalties, including the death sentence, against the perpetrators of the Lilian Burton atrocity and political violence, they also urged it to make sedition a criminal offence, to impose collective punishment on all those who had taken part in the attack against Lilian, and to modify the judicial system in order to quicken the prosecution and imprisonment of black nationalist offenders.³³

The EMWU was not alone in suggesting such draconian measures. A European housewife sceptical of the ability of white men to fight Africans appealed to her fellow women to take up the challenge to defend European lives, just 'as women in South Africa did during the South African War, and as the women in Israel do today'.³⁴ Her views were reinforced by Bill Rendall, a member of the Legislative Council. Echoing the incensed housewife's sentiments, Rendall challenged the colonial state to 'shed its kid gloves in dealing with [African]

primitive savagery'. He urged the authorities to restrict hours of permissible movements of blacks on the Copperbelt, to relocate those who were unemployed to rural areas and, most crucially, to ban UNIP itself.³⁵ Likewise, Francis Mazzieri, the Catholic Bishop of Ndola, threatened to excommunicate from the church all African Christians involved in any anti-colonial activity.³⁶

It is tempting to dismiss the vitriolic language with which conservative-minded Europeans greeted the murder of Mrs Burton and the harsh measures they proposed to counter African nationalism as simply motivated by sheer racism or xenophobia. But underlying their intemperate language and the quest for revenge was the fact that these Europeans came to see Lilian's killing as a potent symbol of the dangers that African nationalism posed to their political hegemony and to the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland that underpinned their power. In denouncing UNIP leaders as 'half-savage mobsters' whose nationalist activity could only spawn more bloodshed, they positioned black nationalists as not only politically immature and violent but also as an uncivilized 'dangerous Other', and thus totally unfit to govern.³⁷ To these Europeans, therefore, Lilian Burton's death became an important discursive location for suppressing UNIP's quest for freedom, for legitimizing their own right to rule, and for tightening their grasp on political reins.

This analysis finds sufficient support in the settlers' growing clamour in the aftermath of Lilian Burton's death to augment their political control through the severance of ties between Lusaka and the Colonial Office in London. As a number of authors have intimated, Europeans in Central Africa generally saw the surveillance of the Colonial Office as a major obstacle to suppressing African political demands and attaining self-government and eventually a dominion status.³⁸ To be sure, the settlers' call to disengage from London commenced long

before Lilian Burton was murdered and was inexorably linked to the politics of amalgamation and federation. But there is no doubt that this clamour reached its crescendo after her killing. For, to conservative settlers and their representatives in the Legislative Council, the alleged failure of the territorial and metropolitan officials to deal decisively and swiftly with the perpetrators of the atrocity became a metaphor for the authorities' indifference toward the political plight of white settlers in British Africa. The Burton killing at the peak of the African struggle for independence thus legitimized their demand for removing the control of the Colonial Office. In this vein, they intensified their rejection of being governed by its appointees in the colony, including the Governor. D. W. Winchesterfould, a pre-war settler of Ndola, typified this rejection when he, on 11 May 1960, challenged fellow Europeans in the Federation to rally behind the newly elected Federal Prime Minister Roy Welensky and his shrill demand for responsible government. Winchesterfould did more. He urged settlers to wrest power from the British government and not to shun using force to suppress African nationalism.³⁹

The offensive against metropolitan control was perhaps best summed up by a *Northern News* correspondent who on 12 May 1960 castigated Ian Macleod, the British Colonial Secretary, as 'the albatross' around the neck of the British government. The columnist noted that Macleod was not unwilling to give in to African nationalist demands for the dismemberment of the Federation and for independence. He concluded that Macleod's disposition toward the Federation and African demands – which the columnist dismissed as a gross betrayal of European civilization in Africa – fuelled local anti-colonial agitation and violence.⁴⁰ Writing from Ndola, another contributor to the newspaper wondered why Macleod and other officials in London 'all of whom should know better [were] determined to place millions of people [in Central

Africa] under the complete domination of [black] men who [knew] nothing of, and care[d] nothing for, the morality of government, who by their speeches show[ed] their abysmal ignorance of public and political honesty or their utter contempt of it'.⁴¹ Similar sentiments were echoed by G. Fox, another settler in Ndola who regularly published bitter letters in *Northern News* in the aftermath of Mrs Burton's murder. Convinced that Britain was determined to 'so shamefully abandon her countrymen in Africa' to 'the agitator, the demagogue and the thug', Fox denounced metropolitan officials as 'sick in the head, sick in the heart, sick in all and every part'. He contended that such leaders were little more than 'do-gooders,' who had 'abdicated to [African] terrorism', thereby abrogating their moral authority and their claim to shape the political destiny of Central Africa.⁴²

It is obvious, then, that conservative elements in colonial Zambia appropriated Lilian Burton's death to legitimize their drive for disengagement from the control of the British government. It is in this vein that they singled out for venomous criticism not only the Colonial Office and its agents in Africa but also those politicians of liberal persuasion in the metropole who, like Barbara Castle, supported anti-colonial movements in the British Empire after 1945.⁴³ For conservative settlers, Mrs Burton's death meant that the territory had now to be 'governed by experienced [white] Northern Rhodesians' without any political interference from Whitehall.⁴⁴ To them, the murder of the defenceless white housewife by black 'hooligans' not only significantly increased the spectre of the alleged 'black peril' against European women specifically, and other whites generally – in a racially divided society where the colonized enjoyed numerical superiority over Europeans⁴⁵ – it further bolstered the settlers' call to reconstitute and reinforce their power, liberating it once and for all from the clutches of the Colonial Office in London. As expected, the

tempo of their outcry for the construction of a political arrangement similar to that existing in the self-governing Southern Rhodesia reached its feverish peak in the aftermath of the Lilian Burton murder. To the settlers and their political representatives, self-rule became as indispensable to annihilating the control of the Colonial Office as it was essential to containing African nationalist demands and, in settler terminology, defending Western civilization in Africa.⁴⁶

Plainly, conservative Europeans transformed Lilian Burton's demise into a means to shore up their own political power. In reality, though, not all whites in the territory danced to the lyrics of conservative nationalism greased by the tragedy. Prominent among those opposed to conservative political demands were liberal-minded settlers in all three member states of the Federation, notably those in the Capricorn Africa Society.⁴⁷ There exists a considerable body of literature on the ways in which liberal settlers with their political representatives in the Federation and London countered the conservative political scheme and influenced the contours of the decolonization process in post-war Africa in the 1950s and 1960s.⁴⁸ Conspicuously absent from this scholarship, however, is the manner in which white exponents of liberalism in the region symbolically harnessed the murder of Lilian Burton to structure or reinforce their political discourse or agenda.

To be sure, European liberals shared other settlers' fears, revulsion, anger and grief over the murder of Mrs Burton.⁴⁹ Similarly, they were equally concerned about the emergence of radical African nationalism and organized labour. But whereas conservative settlers were determined to deploy the murder of Lilian Burton to intensify their crusade to crush African nationalism, white liberals saw in her death a wide window through which they could improve race relations in Central Africa.⁵⁰ In so doing, they sought to champion multiracial 'partnership,' the (much-neglected) ideological

cornerstone of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. It was on this foundation that they hoped to build liberal democracy in the Federation based on a Westminster model and values. Not only did these liberals seek to inculcate such values in the colonized and train them in democratic principles of governance, but they were also eager to establish a multiracial system of governance in which could be included a few educated Africans imbued with democratic values and elected to law-making organs on the basis of a qualified franchise. Liberals envisaged that this political arrangement would both foster economic development and ensure efficiency and high standards in the governance of the territory.⁵¹ This would in turn foster racial harmony, obviating UNIP's demand for universal suffrage and independence.

It is unsurprising, then, that liberal-minded Europeans saw the murder in question as a major affront to their liberal project. Worried about deepening political polarization between Europeans and Africans engendered by Lilian Burton's killing, they reinvigorated their campaign for the inclusion of Western-educated Africans into the socio-political mainstream to represent the black majority. A few days after the murder, D. Moultrie, a Copperbelt-based white liberal, dismissed as 'unreasonable' fellow Europeans in the colony who were reluctant 'to accept the *emerged* African as a full member of society'.⁵² Moultrie was vehemently opposed to UNIP's demand for 'one man, one vote'. But, echoing Cecil Rhodes' dictum of 'equal rights for all civilized men', he made it abundantly clear that it was essential to 'remove barriers between men of equal ability and equal standing wherever such barriers exist[ed]'.⁵³ This, to Moultrie, was no less an inevitable step toward gradual incorporation of Africans into the social process than it was essential to improving black-white political relations, thereby preventing inter-racial conflicts such as the one that claimed the housewife's life.

Similar sentiments were earlier echoed by the Reverend Collin Morris of the Free Church on the Copperbelt. Morris was an ardent believer in the eventual triumph of African nationalism and tirelessly campaigned for it from the pulpit.⁵⁴ But the liberal cause was perhaps best articulated by Patrick C. Arnold, a long-time settler on the Copperbelt. With imminent independence in the nearby Belgian Congo and Tanganyika, and perhaps the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya and recent riots in nearby Nyasaland (Malawi), fresh on his mind, Arnold warned other Europeans in the colony against delaying the inclusion of educated Africans in the political process. He maintained that such delay 'would in the long run only bring ... nothing but [more] harm' to the white community. Arnold advised conservative settlers in Central Africa to 'face the fact that the African [was] not going to be content to be permanently controlled by the minority European population'. With independence looming in neighbouring territories, Africans in Northern Rhodesia, Patrick Arnold continued, 'w[ould] demand the same conditions ... whether independence worked in those territories or not'.⁵⁵

This white liberal agenda brought into sharper relief tensions within the settler community. Incensed by Collin Morris's support for African nationalism, another European correspondent to *Northern News*, who branded white liberals in Africa as 'Kaffir-lovers', admonished the clergyman for not confining himself to the pulpit. 'If Mr Morris h[e]ld out his hand any further toward the African', warned the incensed writer, the cleric '[was] going to get it bitten mighty hard'. Even though Morris had earlier castigated the Africans who killed Lilian Burton, the correspondent wondered why the clergyman did not condemn blacks who murdered innocent people. Did Morris, concluded the angry settler, believe that 'illiterate Africans [were] a good substitute for the brilliant brains of the white man?'⁵⁶

If the liberal agenda met stiff opposition from white conservatives opposed to sharing power with Africans, it also evoked considerable scorn, condemnation and ridicule from UNIP top leadership for its reluctance to concede majority rule.⁵⁷ Yet even though this political project provoked condemnation from UNIP, it nonetheless earned the support of a few moderate African nationalists in colonial Zambia eager to employ Mrs Burton's murder to push forward their own political vision.⁵⁸ These nationalists, like their counterparts elsewhere in Central Africa, saw the Federation with its ideology of racial partnership as a political space through which imperial authorities could make good the promise of the inclusion of Western-educated blacks into the mainstream, hence opening to them the benefits implicit in colonial citizenship.⁵⁹ They were therefore as much opposed to UNIP's dictatorial brand of nationalism with its violent tactics as they fervently preached racial harmony. Gabriel Musumbulwa, who became an MP in 1962 on the ticket of the white-controlled United Federal Party, and Godwin A. Lewanika, the first President of the ANC and MP in the Federal government in the 1960s, epitomized this group. In a lengthy letter published in the press on 11 May 1960, Lewanika denounced UNIP leaders as little more than messengers of arson, terrorism and murder who had 'achieved nothing in their lives'. He insisted that UNIP's intolerance to dissenting political views, coupled with its use of intimidation and murder, was intended 'to gain political popularity'. This, Lewanika lamented, stood in the path of African political advancement and multiracialism. To the delight of European settlers and authorities such as Roy Welesnky,⁶⁰ the Federal MP urged colonial authorities to incarcerate UNIP leaders and thus 'stop [political] violence at its source'.⁶¹

In branding UNIP as no more than an enterprise of arsonists and killers, Godwin Lewanika defined it as a party that, if

elected into office, would neither guarantee good governance, nor protect life or property. UNIP would thus reduce individual and civil liberties, creating a barrier against multiracial efforts to build a liberal democratic society and to secure racial harmony in Central Africa. Lewanika's polemic was, of course, music to the ears of the ANC, UNIP's arch rival in the heated competition for popular support. Echoing the MP's sentiments, and with Lilian Burton's death in mind, ANC officials routinely chided UNIP as an angel of destruction and death. Writing at the end of 1962 to oppose the imminent formation of a coalition government between the ANC and UNIP, J. D. Lungu, a top-ranking ANC official, implored its National Secretary to distance the party from UNIP. The followers of the latter party, Lungu insisted, were 'unscrupulous savages' who intimidated and 'burn[t] people alive' to gain cheap political mileage.⁶² His views were endorsed by the National Secretary, who, four years after the killing of Lilian Burton, still dismissed UNIP leaders as autocratic 'masters of intimidation' and urged the youth league in the ANC to fight against UNIP violence at any cost.⁶³ Other ANC functionaries likewise portrayed leaders in the rival party as power-hungry men who had blindly imbibed Lenin's communist dictum that 'there are no morals in politics but expediency'.⁶⁴ From ANC's perspective, UNIP's *raison d'être* amounted to little more than seizing the reins of power by any means, including intimidation, arson and murder.⁶⁵

Conversely, the ANC cast itself as a more tolerant party 'fighting for the liberty of the sons and daughters of the soil of Northern Rhodesia', both black and white.⁶⁶ The party repeatedly assured its followers that, once in office, it would not only 'safeguard the rights of all individuals' but also hold out 'hope for the future of everyone'.⁶⁷ In articulating its opposition to UNIP over the terrain of death, in accusing UNIP of communist leanings and in imagining itself as the ultimate guarantor of peace, life and freedom for all, the ANC legitimized

its own claim to power and, ideologically, moved itself further right on the political spectrum. The party therefore conferred upon itself what Giacomo Macola aptly describes as 'an incontrovertible badge of moderation', while simultaneously demonizing UNIP as a leftist political organization replete with murderers.⁶⁸

But leaders in UNIP refused to let their detractors use the murder of Lilian Burton 'as a means to get political traction' over their party and thus dampen their own quest for power.⁶⁹ In the aftermath of Mrs Burton's killing, several high-ranking UNIP officials went to great lengths to disassociate their party from her death, some of them blaming it on unruly elements in the party.⁷⁰ Others, including Kenneth Kaunda, the party's President and chief policy architect, portrayed the housewife's death as the unfortunate consequence of the unwillingness of European settlers and of the British government to dismantle the Federation and surrender power to Africans.⁷¹ UNIP thus exonerated itself from her death. From this viewpoint, it justified its dictatorial brand of nationalism and accelerated its violent crusade against political foes, both black and white. This both deepened the ideological gulf between UNIP and the ANC and further aggravated inter-party tensions, especially in the Copperbelt, where escalating clashes frequently led to further loss of lives and unprecedented destruction of property.⁷²

To conclude this section, there is much to commend the assertion by symbolic and other anthropologists that the dead, as ritual objects, possess the capacity to influence the contours of the politics of the living.⁷³ This is borne out by the ways in which the death of Lilian Margaret Burton at the hands of UNIP foot soldiers in the early 1960s spawned diverse, if not irreconcilable, political trajectories and visions. Different actors read different meanings into her death and appropriated it to advance conflicting nationalist agendas. Lilian Burton's

death became a symbol around which white conservatives sought to challenge British power in Central Africa, suffocate African nationalist aspirations and consolidate their own political supremacy. To white liberal settlers, however, Lilian's death brought into sharp relief the necessity to integrate educated blacks into the socio-political process of colonial society in order to secure racial and political harmony. This agenda aggravated tensions between liberal and conservative settlers, as the latter were unwilling to share power with Africans. On the other hand, moderate African nationalists, who, like white liberals, championed inclusionary politics, saw in Lilian Burton's death a means to discredit UNIP as a party of murderers who could not guarantee individual and civil liberties. In this way, the ANC sought to discredit UNIP's claim to govern, disqualifying it from taking power. This conflicted with the UNIP's authoritarian agenda and struggle for power by any means, leading to increasing and often fatal clashes between the rival parties.

Death and the Reconstitution of Social Order

In her recent studies, Stacey Hynd remarks that white authorities in imperial Africa perceived politically motivated murders as a gross danger to their power and authority.⁷⁴ It is no surprise, then, that the killing of Lilian Burton on the Copperbelt in 1960 deepened the gulf between colonial rulers and African nationalists. In the eyes of the authorities, her murder exposed the degree to which black nationalism challenged existing socio-colonial order and political power. In the aftermath of her death, therefore, authorities in both Lusaka and London came to see their responsibility as that of reinforcing social order. Thus, in spite of endless settler accusations of being too weak to stem the tide of nationalist

violence, Governor Sir Evelyn Hone quickly marshalled institutions of state control to reinstitute order. A few days after the attack on Mrs Burton, he announced that the colonial state was 'resolute that violence in all its manifestations in this territory shall be stamped out and that the right of law-abiding citizens to go about their business peaceably without fear shall be preserved'.⁷⁵

To this end, the colonial state invoked soon after Lilian's murder the Preservation of Public Security Ordinance, under which it enacted a number of far-reaching security measures published in a special issue of the *Government Gazette*,⁷⁶ with the approval of the Colonial Office in London.⁷⁷ To stem the whirlwind of anti-colonial agitation and to augment colonial power and authority, the ordinance empowered the police to arrest and detain without warrant any suspected person(s) in possession of arms, petrol, explosive substances and sticks or other missiles.⁷⁸ Under the ordinance, the Governor himself banned all UNIP branches, meetings and other political activities on the Copperbelt, and he also reserved the power to arrest any offender in the interest of public security. Magistrates, too, could detain suspects for forty-eight hours for political offences.⁷⁹ Offenders convicted of possession of prohibited objects became liable for five years' imprisonment, while those charged with destroying property and injuring or threatening to injure other persons were similarly liable for incarceration for ten years.⁸⁰

With the Preservation of Public Security Ordinance still in force, the courts increasingly imposed what Alastair Porter, a Kitwe-based Magistrate, termed as 'exemplary punishment' against Africans convicted of arson, assault, rioting or political offences. Meted out mostly against black political 'agitators', exemplary punishments involved lengthy prison sentences combined with hard labour. Early in 1960, Magistrate Porter jailed seven nationalists for periods ranging between twenty-one

months to three years with hard labour.⁸¹ To see to it that 'law and order was enforced', his counterpart at Ndola similarly ordered a fifteen-year-old African boy to receive twelve strokes of the cane for taking part in throwing stones at a beer hall on the day that Lilian Burton was attacked.⁸²

But all these sentences paled in comparison with the capital punishment that Justice J. R. Blagden passed in 1961 against three UNIP activists: Edward Cresta Ngebe, John Paikani Phiri and Robin Kangwa Kamima, the alleged masterminds behind the Burton killing. Justice Blagden admitted that the evidence on which he convicted the accused was at best contradictory and at worst involved outright fabrications by prosecution witnesses. He also noted that as the victim was assailed by a mob that had also earlier attacked other motorists before stoning her car, it was impossible to establish whether her murder was premeditated. Nonetheless, he sent the accused to the gallows.⁸³ In view of Blagden's own admission that the circumstances that resulted in Lilian's murder were as murky as the evidence he used to convict the supposed ringleaders, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that their execution was mainly intended to bolster colonial rule and to punish UNIP.

This extreme penalty of law raised an outcry from within the colony and indeed in the metropole, particularly among those who saw it as a gross miscarriage of justice and hence incommensurate with Britain's 'civilizing mission' in its overseas empire.⁸⁴ But the capital punishment was upheld by Governor Sir Evelyn Hone and the British Government. This was in their firm belief that the execution of the convicts would act as a deterrent to violent nationalism and, no doubt, position the colonial and metropolitan authorities themselves as indispensable to guaranteeing socio-political order and stability in British Africa. From this perspective, the execution of the UNIP cadres together with the draconian security measures that the authorities promulgated on the heels of the

Lilian Burton tragedy were, to borrow Hynd's memorable phrase, 'stark enactments' of colonial power calculated to uphold the status quo and to transform the colonized into pliant subjects of the empire.⁸⁵

Conclusion

Most works on African nationalism have overlooked the symbolic value of mortality in the construction of conflicting nationalist projects in Africa in the 1950s and 1960s. By placing the killing of Lilian Burton at the centre of its analysis, this study demonstrates the ways in which African and European nationalists in Central Africa turned her death at the hands of UNIP activists on the Zambian Copperbelt in 1960 into a viable symbol for the purpose of political mobilization. To conservative white nationalists, the killing became a discursive site for dismissing African nationalists' quest for freedom, as well as for disengaging politically from the Colonial Office.

But the unfortunate demise of Lilian Burton did not just pit African and European nationalisms against each other. For different political actors within each of these camps read entirely different meanings into her death, deploying it to advance conflicting political projects and visions. While conservative Europeans used her murder to tighten their grip on power, liberal-minded settlers saw in it the necessity to improve race relations, to free African nationalism from racial exclusiveness and to grant a limited franchise to a few educated blacks. Through the Burton killing, therefore, liberal settlers ultimately hoped to make good Cecil Rhodes' dictum: 'equal rights to all civilized men'. At the same time, Burton's death widened the gulf between moderate and radical African nationalists in the ANC and UNIP respectively. Heaping blame at UNIP's door for Lilian Burton's tragic end, the ANC denounced

UNIP as an organization of murderers unworthy of taking power. The ANC's stand regarding the murder met stiff rebuttal from UNIP, heightening tensions and violence between the two parties, a situation that persisted well after 1964. Thus, long after her death, Lilian Margaret Burton's murder continued to shape the politics of the living, who stubbornly refused to heed her advice not to transform her tragedy into political fodder. Clearly, then, Lilian Burton's murder became a potent site of competing rival nationalisms.

ENDNOTES: CHAPTER VI

1. See, for example, David W. Throup, *Economic and Social Origins of Mau Mau, 1945–53* (London: James Currey, 1987); *Soldiers in Zimbabwe's Liberation War*, ed. by Gwabi Bhebe and Terence Ranger (London: James Currey, 1995); David Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged: Britain's Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005). For the most recent works on this issue see Owen J. M. Kalinga, 'The 1959 Nyasaland State of Emergency in Old Karonga District', *Journal of Southern African History* (forthcoming) and Philip Murphy, 'A Police State? The Nyasaland Emergency and Colonial Intelligence', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 36, 4 (2010).
2. For an illuminating article on the relationship between death-related rituals and politics of belonging see Peter Geschiere, 'Funerals and Belonging: Different Patterns in Cameroon', *African Studies Review*, 48, 2 (2005), 45–64.
3. Wade Adebani, 'Death, National Memory and the Social Construction of Heroism', *Journal of African History*, 49 (2008), 419–44.
4. David William Cohen and E. S. Atieno Odhiambo, *Burying SM: The Politics of Knowledge and the Sociology of Power in Africa* (Portsmouth, NH and London: James Currey, 1992).
5. Matthew D. Esposito, 'The Politics of Death: State Funerals as Rites of Reconciliation in Porfirian Mexico, 1876–1889', *Americas*, 62, 1 (2005), 65–94.
6. Adebani, 'Death, National Memory', p. 420.
7. Ibid.

8. See Kalusa, this volume on 'Death and African Miners'. Other examples include Pier M. Larson, 'Austronesian Mortuary Ritual in History: Transformations of Secondary Burial (*Famadihana*) in Highland Madagascar', *Ethnohistory*, 48, 1–2 (2001), 123–55; Wyatt MacGaffey, *Religion and Society: The Bakongo of the Lower Zaire* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1986); Stephen Ellis, 'The Okija Shrine: Death and Life in Nigerian Politics', *Journal of African History*, 49 (2008), 445–66; Filip De Boeck, 'The Apocalyptic Interlude: Revealing Death in Kinshasa', *African Studies Review*, 48, 2 (2005), 11–31; Geschiere, 'Funerals and Belonging'; Garrey Michael Dennie, 'Flames of Race, Ashes of Death: Re-Inventing Cremation in Johannesburg, 1910–1945', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 29, 1 (2003), 177–92 and 'The Standard of Dying: Race, Indigence, and the Disposal of the Dead Body in Johannesburg, 1886–1960', *African Studies*, 68, 3 (2009), 310–30; Jennifer Cole and Karen Middleton, 'Rethinking Ancestors and Colonial Power in Madagascar', *Africa*, 71, 1 (2001), 1–36. See also Vaughan, this volume, on 'Divine Kings'.
9. Examples of these studies include Cohen and Atieno Odhiambo, *Burying SM*; Terence Ranger, 'Dignifying Death: Politics of Burial in Bulawayo', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 34, 1–2 (2004), 110–44; Geschiere, 'Funerals and Belonging'; Esposito, 'Politics of Death'; Michael C. Kearl and Anael Rinaldi, 'The Political Uses of the Dead as Symbols in Contemporary Civil Religions', *Social Forces*, 61, 3 (1983), 693–708; Rebekah Lee and Megan Vaughan, 'Death and Dying in the History of Africa Since 1800', *Journal of African History*, 49 (2008), 341–59; in the same volume see Stacey Hynd, 'Killing the Condemned: The Practice and Process of Capital Punishment in British Africa, 1900–1950s', 403–18; Dennie, 'Flames of Race'; Adebani, 'Death, National Memory'.
10. My inspiration here derives from Stacey Hynd, 'Decorum or Deterrence? The Politics of Execution in Malawi, 1915–1966' (unpublished paper, n.d.). I am grateful to Stacey for granting me access to this paper.

11. United National Independence Party Archives (hereafter UNIPA) 14/2/1, *Grim Peep in the North, Special Issue of the Voice of UNIP*, January 1962.
12. For a fuller treatment of the creation of the Central African Federation, also called the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland see Robert I. Rotberg, *The Rise of Nationalism in Central Africa: The Making of Malawi and Zambia, 1873–1964* (Cambridge, MA: Oxford University Press, 1966) and ‘The Federation Movement in British East and Central Africa, 1889–1953’, *Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies*, 2, 2 (1963), 141–60.
13. My insight here derives from Hynd, ‘Killing the Condemned’.
14. Much of this data derives from L. J. Butler, *Copper Empire: Mining and the Colonial State in Northern Rhodesia, c. 1930–64* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007).
15. Butler, *Copper Empire*, pp. 198–99.
16. Ibid.; Allison K. Shutt and Tony King, ‘Imperial Rhodesians: The 1953 Rhodes Centenary Exhibition in Southern Rhodesia’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 31, 2 (2005), 357–79.
17. Butler, *Copper Empire*; Eugenia W. Herbert, *Twilight on the Zambezi: Late Colonialism in Central Africa* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2002), Chapter 3; Shutt and King, ‘Imperial Rhodesians’.
18. James A. Pritchett, *Friends for Life, Friends for Death: Cohorts and Consciousness among the Lunda-Ndembu* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2007), pp. 128–39; Herbert, *Twilight on the Zambezi*.
19. On Federal constitutional arrangements that increased European power and economic privileges respectively see, for example, Herbert, *Twilight on the Zambezi* and J. F. Hollenman with S. Biesheuvel, *White Mine Workers in Northern Rhodesia, 1959–60* (Leiden: Afrika-Studiecentrum and Cambridge, African Studies Centre, 1973).

20. Herbert, *Twilight on the Zambezi*, p 98.
21. For the latest and most nuanced analysis of the split of ZANC from the ANC see Giacomo Macola, *Liberal Nationalism in Central Africa: A Biography of Harry Mwaanga Nkumbula* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), Chapter 3.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 76.
23. *Voice of UNIP*, April 1962, p. 8; *Voice of UNIP*, November 1962; UNIPA/UNIP, 14/2/2; *Voice of UNIP*, April 1963; UNIPA/UNIP, 14/2/13; *Voice of UNIP*, June 1963; UNIPA/UNIP, 14/2/12; *Voice of UNIP*, July 1963; UNIPA/UNIP, 14/3/8.
24. Northern Rhodesia, *Hansard No. 100: Official Verbatim Report of the Debates of the Second Session of the Eleventh Legislative Council, 14th June to 5th August 1960* (Lusaka: Government Printer, 1960).
25. *Northern News*, 9 May 1960.
26. *Northern News*, 18 May 1960.
27. See Hynd, 'Killing the Condemned', p. 410.
28. *Northern News*, 11 May 1960.
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Northern News*, 10 May 1960.
31. *Northern News*, 13 May 1960.
32. *Northern News*, 11 May 1960.
33. *Northern News*, 10 May 1960.
34. *Northern News*, 13 May 1960.
35. *Northern News*, 11 May 1960.
36. *Ibid.*
37. My insight here derives from Hynd, 'Killing the Condemned'.
38. Pritchett, *Friends for Life*.
39. *Northern News*, 11 May 1960.
40. *Northern News*, 12 May 1960.
41. *Northern News*, 26 May 1960.

42. *Northern News*, 14 May 1960; see also *Northern News*, 17 May 1960 and *Northern News*, 26 May 1960.
43. *Northern News*, 17 May 1960.
44. *Northern News*, 14 May 1960.
45. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer who stressed the significance of this point. The fear of the so-called 'black peril' was widely shared by European settlers in colonial Zambia, Zimbabwe and South Africa. See Karen Tranberg Hansen, *Distant Companions: Servants and Employers in Zambia, 1900-1985* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1989), pp. 98-106.
46. *Northern News*, 12 May 1960 and *Northern News*, 13 May 1960.
47. For recent studies on this organization see Bizeck J. Phiri, 'The Capricorn Africa Society Revisited: The Role and Impact of "Liberalism" in Zambia's Colonial History', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 24, 1 (1991), 65-83; see also his *A Political History of Zambia: From the Colonial Period to the 3rd Republic* (Trenton, NJ and Asmara: Africa World Press, Inc., 2006).
48. See Robert I. Rotberg, *Black Heart: Gore-Browne and the Politics of Multiracial Zambia* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1977); Kenneth Kaunda, *Zambia Shall Be Free: An Autobiography* (New York, NY: Praeger, 1963); Phiri, 'The Capricorn Africa Society' and *Political History of Zambia*.
49. *Northern News*, 12 May 1960.
50. *Northern News*, 18 May 1960.
51. The issues are discussed at length by Phiri, 'The Capricorn Africa Society'.
52. *Northern News*, 19 May 1960. Emphasis is in the original.
53. Ibid.
54. *Northern News*, 12 May 1960.
55. *Northern News*, 18 May 1960.
56. *Northern News*, 13 May 1960

57. Kaunda, *Zambia Shall Be Free*.
58. *Northern News*, 20 May 1960.
59. Shutt and King, 'Imperial Rhodesians', p. 362.
60. *Northern News*, 27 May 1960.
61. *Northern News*, 11 May 1960.
62. J. D. Lungu to ANC National Secretary, 11 December 1962, UNIPA/ANC 7/44.
63. The first speech delivered by the National Secretary to the first Youth Assembly held in the National Assembly Chamber at Chilenje on Saturday, 18 April 1964, UNIPA/ANC 7/1.
64. *Week by Week*, March 1963, UNIPA/ANC 7/5.
65. Ibid.
66. H. M. Nkumbula to Senior Chief Kalindawalo, 1 February 1963, UNIPA/ANC 7/44.
67. A. N. Banda, Chairman of ANC Fundraising Committee, 8 March 1963, UNIPA/ANC 7/48.
68. Giacomo Macola, 'Harry Nkumbula, UNIP and the Roots of Authoritarianism in Nationalist Zambia', in *One Zambia, Many Histories: Towards a History of Post-Colonial Zambia*, ed. by Jan-Bart Gewald, Marja Hinfelaar and Giacomo Macola (Leiden: Brill 2008), p. 28.
69. I borrow the quoted expression from Derek R. Peterson and Giacomo Macola, 'Introduction: Homespun Historiography and the Academic Profession', in *Recasting the Past: History Writing and Political Work in Modern Africa*, ed. by Derek R. Peterson and Giacomo Macola (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2009), p. 10.
70. See Nephas Tembo, *The Lilian Burton Killing: The Famous Trials of Zambian Freedom Fighters* (Lusaka: Apple Books, 1986).
71. *Northern News*, 16 May 1960.
72. See *Central African Mail*, 8 January 1963; *Central Africa Mail*, 10 January 1963; Macola, 'Roots of Authoritarianism'.

73. See Sjaak van der Geest, 'Between Death and Funeral: Mortuaries and the Exploitation of Liminality in Kwahu, Ghana', *Africa*, 76, 4 (2006), 485–501; Kearn and Rinaldi, 'Political Uses of Death', p. 694; Adebani, 'Death', p. 442.
74. Hynd, 'Decorum or Deterrence?' and 'Killing the Condemned'.
75. Northern Rhodesia, *Hansard No: 100*, p. 3.
76. *Ibid.*; *Northern News*, 12 May 1960 and *Northern News*, 13 May 1960.
77. *Northern News*, 12 May 1960.
78. *Northern News*, 13 May 1960.
79. *Ibid.*
80. *Ibid.*
81. *Northern News*, 11 May 1960.
82. *Northern News*, 12 May 1960.
83. Tembo, *Lilian Burton Killing*, pp. 55–66.
84. Interviews with Costa Ngebe, brother of Edward Ngebe, and Justin Kapamba, Edward's childhood friend, Ndola, 28 January 2010; see also Hynd, 'Decorum or Deterrence?'
85. Hynd, 'Killing the Condemned', pp. 403–04.

CHAPTER VII

Suicide: A Hidden History

Megan Vaughan

In the extensive literature on the history of suicide, the societies of the African continent barely feature, except in brief discussions of folk beliefs and practices.¹ A simple explanation for the relative lack of attention given to this issue is that historically African societies have been assumed to have very low rates of suicide. But that assumption itself needs historicizing. The statistical evidence for suicide in most African countries is extremely weak, and longitudinal data is almost non-existent, so while there are reasons to suggest the need for a re-evaluation of suicide rates in Africa, it is not currently possible to provide one. However, the intellectual history of suicide in Africa can shed light on the issue, as can some evidence from the Malawi in the late colonial period. In the first part of this chapter I present this evidence and analyse it in the context of that intellectual history.

In contemporary central, southern and eastern Africa, concerns over apparently rising suicide rates are being expressed both by mental health professionals and in the popular press. It is tempting to argue that these parts of Africa are experiencing the equivalent of the intensification of anxiety about suicide that surfaced periodically in early modern and nineteenth century Europe – a kind of ‘moral panic’.² As in early eighteenth-century discussions of the ‘English malady’, so in many of these recent reports on Africa

suicide is represented as a symptom of a wider social and moral crisis, as a challenge to 'traditional' values, a sign of the 'anomie' consequent on modernization. I review these contemporary discussions later in this chapter but first I want to explore something of the intellectual history of suicide in Africa, because it is against this background that one must view both the historical and the present-day evidence for suicide on the continent.

Although there is a genealogy of colonial thinking underlying analyses of suicide in Africa, it would be oversimplifying it to argue that these issues are confined to questions of 'race'. Arguments around the interpretation of suicide are complex, and form part of a much more extensive intellectual history. Suicide can be interpreted as a supreme act of will and defiance or as a fatal gesture of despair, as a mark of the autonomy of the self or as evidence of the subjection of the individual to forces beyond his or her control.³ In modern times, and particularly since the publication of Emile Durkheim's *Suicide*, it has been the subject of sociological analysis, supported by the collection of social statistics.⁴ At the same time, the development of modern psychiatry has contributed to a 'medicalization' of suicide and characterizations of the suicidal mind as sick, despairing or overwhelmed by inverted anger, depending on theoretical orientation. Meanwhile, some historical and cross-cultural analyses call into question the status of suicide as a single category of analysis.⁵ But there is a specific trajectory to thinking about suicide in Africa.

The current interest in the subject of suicide in Africa is all the more striking when viewed against a longer history of colonial thinking on what came to be known as the 'African mind'.⁶ In both professional and lay colonial writing on African psychology, 'Africans' were generally held to be a happy-go-lucky 'race' of people with few cares in the world, and what

cares they had they were likely to attribute to the actions of others, via the medium of witchcraft or the intervention of spirits, rather than to their own actions. African people, it was argued, did not suffer from introspection and guilt, and so one rarely encountered depressive illness among them. And since suicide was linked to depression in this literature, rather than to aggression, it followed from this that they rarely killed themselves. This was less a theory than a discourse, but it has had a long and vigorous life.⁷ The political utility of these ideas in the context of colonialism is clear. Africans were not fully formed individuals, and were incapable of taking responsibility for their own actions. Their fears and anxieties were externalized, their own misdeeds and harmful thoughts projected onto others. Unfamiliar with the experience of guilt, lacking the internal world of introspection, they rarely fell into anything approaching suicidal despair.⁸

In 1967 Raymond Prince published a review of the literature on depressive illness in Africa, dating back to 1895. He pointed out the biases in reporting during the colonial period and argued tentatively (and maybe even slightly tongue-in-cheek) that the political changes of independence were likely to bring about both a greater willingness on the part of a new generation of African psychiatry professionals to label certain states 'depression', and a real increase in rates of depressive illness: 'I believe that we can look forward to seeing increasing numbers of depressions in Africa and no doubt even depressions with a prominent component of guilt and self-deprecation'.⁹

It is relatively easy to dissect and dismiss the biases of the 'colonial mind' on the subject of depressive illness in Africa, but as Prince implied, there are some enduring theoretical and methodological questions concerning the cross-cultural definition and diagnosis of depressive illness that continue to occupy mental health practitioners and researchers.¹⁰ Even if one concludes that depressive illness has been under-diagnosed

in Africa, one should be aware of the dangers of extending the 'empire of depression'.¹¹

Studies of suicide in the colonial period were, for the most part, simple extensions of the argument about the rarity of 'real' depressive illness in African subjects. The very low rates of suicide quoted by these studies were, as Henri Collomb and René Collignon pointed out in their review of the literature, highly questionable.¹² In reviewing the evidence for the place of suicide in African cultural models and value systems, Collomb and Collignon found that in many African communities suicide was viewed as a quintessentially 'bad' death, one that denied the perpetrator a place in the spirit world of the lineage. But there were also marked variations in approaches, even between neighbouring peoples, with some groups viewing suicide not as a crime but as an act of bravery. In highly stratified societies in Africa, suicide as reparation for dishonour was not uncommon, but 'shame' was also a more widespread sentiment allegedly motivating suicide.¹³ Collomb and Collignon concluded that 'shame' rather than 'guilt' characterized African societies, producing a somewhat more sophisticated version of the familiar argument about the absence of guilt in African subjects. They also referred to the role ascribed to supernatural forces in some African explanations of suicide. This had been noted by, among many others, M. D. W. Jeffreys, who argued on the basis of African material that a fourth category of suicide should be added to Durkheim's typology. He called this 'Samsonic' suicide, in which the subject commits suicide with the specific aim of taking revenge on another. The motivation for this form of suicide rested on the belief that the spirit of a man could return after his death.¹⁴

Supernatural forces were also prominent in the anthropological case studies contained in Paul Bohannan's path-breaking 1960 volume *African Homicide and Suicide*.¹⁵ Bohannan aimed not only to evaluate the available African

evidence against Durkheim's analysis of suicide, but also to test out the theory that there was an inverse relationship between suicide and homicide.¹⁶ Most of his contributors found it difficult to draw any definitive conclusions on these issues, given the limits of their statistical evidence, but their case studies were revealing of social attitudes toward suicide. To varying degrees, the communities studied feared the consequences of suicide and performed modified burial rites on the bodies of suicide cases.¹⁷ In her contribution, Jean La Fontaine reported that the Gisu people of western Kenya considered suicide to be an evil act. It was not intrinsically evil, it seems, but evil in the sense that it was thought to result from an undesirable and dangerous set of circumstances characterized by bad relations between individuals, or between individuals and their ancestors. Suicide was also considered to be contagious, and contact with the body of a suicide was regarded as extremely dangerous. La Fontaine argued that the Gisu believed that only the ancestors could make people kill themselves, and they could do it in one of two ways: either by making those individuals feel so ashamed of some antisocial act that they felt impelled to commit suicide, or by involving them in arguments with their close kin, so that they would ultimately kill themselves out of *litima*. *Litima* is translated by La Fontaine as 'temper': a liability to fits of anger and violence that can be inherited across generations.

As La Fontaine's contribution indicated, any thorough study of suicide in African societies would rest on an understanding of notions of personhood and related ideas about relationships, not only among the living, but also between the living and the dead.¹⁸ That these ideas go beyond the conventional colonial representation of the 'African mind' is evident from a corpus of sensitive anthropological work. Any comprehensive historical study would have to include the impact of both Islam and Christianity on attitudes toward suicide, and any intellectual

history of suicide in Africa would also need to go beyond a study of 'traditional' beliefs and practices (important as those may be) to encompass political and legal discourses. It may have sounded fanciful to suggest, as Prince did, that with the coming of political independence Ghanaians would be more likely to kill themselves, but as much comparative literature shows, political discourses can have a profound effect in legitimizing or delegitimizing suicidal acts.¹⁹

The theoretical and methodological issues raised by a historical study of suicide in Africa are daunting, though hardly uniquely so. The history of suicide is in part a history of subjectivity, and no history of that sort is ever going to be straightforward. Colonial evidence is undoubtedly biased in a number of ways, but the nature of that evidence is itself part of the intellectual history of suicide in Africa, though by no means the whole of that history. This is an under-researched field, and one that could be enormously enriched by further oral historical and social anthropological work. Some of the challenges arise out of the nature of the evidence available for suicide in African societies, but others are common to the analysis of the phenomenon of suicide wherever and whenever it occurs. Inevitably constrained by the nature of their evidence, historians of suicide must also decide whether the analysis of suicide should be primarily sociological or intellectual, whether it should engage in a possibly anachronistic form of psychological speculation or view such speculation as an obstacle in the way of understanding.

Some of these large questions can be negotiated through the analysis of a specific body of evidence: colonial inquests from Malawi. This archive is a component of the intellectual history of suicide in one region of Africa, so any such analysis must be addressed to the question (raised by historians of other parts of the world) of how far the inquisitorial system itself came to influence social attitudes toward, and possibly

even definitions of, suicide. Despite the formal nature of this evidence, it also displays a hesitant and porous quality, inadvertently revealing aspects of suicide cases that were not easily contained within dominant colonial scripts and that might point to a more complex picture of the intellectual history of suicide in this region.²⁰

The inquest did give rise to a certain kind of forensic psychological approach to suicide, but how influential this was is extremely hard to know. There are parallels between the processes at work here and the 'secularization' of suicide in Europe and the replacement of 'passions' by the 'emotions' in modern European thought, but the particular circumstances of colonial Africa produced a complex picture, the full dimensions of which remain to be fully explored.²¹ Of course, the task of the historian is not to add his or her musings on the psychology of historical subjects to those already imposed by this kind of regime, but suicide must be understood within specific social, political and economic contexts, so a sociological analysis of at least a very basic sort is called for. It is not necessary to impose a formal categorization on suicide cases, but certain assumptions are inevitable with respect to such things as the gender dimensions of suicide and the apparent role of poverty and ill health in some cases. Although such an approach is undoubtedly open to criticism, it does offer the possibility of inserting the history of suicide in Africa into a wider comparative history, revealing not only marked differences but also striking similarities between societies.

Suicide Inquests from Late Colonial Malawi

Historians of suicide in different times and places have drawn attention to the nature of the archival material at their disposal and the role of statistics in the history of suicide.²² The sample

available for this analysis is small – just 123 cases, drawn from records of inquests held in colonial courts in Malawi between the late 1940s and the late 1960s, predominantly between 1948 and 1959. Nyasaland, as it was known, became a British protectorate in 1891, and although some inquest records exist for the 1920s and 1930s, they are few in number. The existence of many more records from the late 1940s can be largely explained by the increasing presence of the colonial state in the lives of its subjects in the post-Second World War period.²³ More specifically, the holding of inquests and the more systematic recording of their proceedings was a consequence of the passage in 1948 of an Ordinance Relating to Inquests.²⁴ This ordinance aimed to improve and systematize procedures for the reporting of ‘violent or unnatural’ deaths, and the referral of these cases, when appropriate, to the judicial system. It empowered local colonial administrative officers to act as coroners and required them to hold inquests into any ‘violent or unnatural’ deaths reported to have occurred within their jurisdictions. It also made it the duty of anyone finding the body of someone who appeared to have suffered such a death to report it to the native authority or to the police or an administrative officer.²⁵ Failure to do so made one liable to conviction under the ordinance and to a possible prison sentence or fine. In practice, the native authority or the headman of the village in which the death had taken place would have to persuade the family of the deceased to postpone the burial while a message was sent to the nearest colonial administrative centre or police station. A medical officer would then be required to examine the body and make a report to the coroner, and other relevant evidence would have to be gathered from witnesses. Finally, an inquest would be held at the district headquarters, sometimes at a very great distance from the site of the incident, at which the witnesses were required to appear.

When James Malunga, who lived in a village in Fort Johnston District, hanged himself from a tree on the morning of 24 October 1952, the inquisitorial system seems to have been followed almost to the letter.²⁶ The body was found by his wife, hanging some twenty paces from the house that they shared. By the time it was seen by the court messenger (a paid assistant to the chief), it had already been cut down and moved to a bed in the house. On the following day, it was examined by a medical officer who had been sent from Fort Johnston, some distance away. The inquest into Malunga's death opened in Fort Johnston on 7 November and was presided over by the district commissioner acting as coroner. On 26 November, the district commissioner forwarded his record of the inquest to the attorney general in the colonial capital, Zomba. At sixteen pages, it is not a very extensive document, but it is, superficially at least, impressive in its thoroughness and attention to detail. It includes three official forms: Form B (Death Report to the Coroner), Form D (Report of the Medical Practitioner) and Form E (The Inquisition), as well as 'Exhibit A: A Roug [*sic*] Sketch of Scene of Hanging' drawn by the court messenger, and ten pages of evidence recorded from the proceedings of the inquest. Only a small number of inquest records from this period included a 'rough sketch' by an enthusiastic African police constable, but in other respects this is not an untypical record. A few included suicide notes, adding another dimension to the written record.

Archives can mislead. Although the very existence of these records is an indication of the greater ambition of the late colonial state in this part of Africa, there is no evidence that the colonial rulers of Nyasaland had any particular prior interest in why and at what rates their subjects killed themselves. Suicide was generally held to be rare among Africans, and in all likelihood the administrative officers of Nyasaland shared this view, if they thought about the subject

at all. However, one of the effects of the implementation of the 1948 ordinance was to bring suicide cases to their attention, and when faced with these cases, many officers exhibited a perhaps surprising level of interest in what some termed the 'motives' for suicide. Although the inquisitorial system undoubtedly 'medicalized' suicide to a degree, it also produced a particular kind of forensic psychology and a quest for truth.²⁷ Once the (possibly contentious) decision had been made by the village headman to report a death as 'unnatural', a colonial machinery of sorts cranked into action. Malunga might have anticipated that his taking of his own life would not pass unnoticed among his family, friends and neighbours, and that they would be likely to ask a number of questions about it, but he probably did not know that his death would occasion so much form-filling, nor that the scar of the old crocodile bite above his left ankle would be noted and recorded. Nor was he likely to have anticipated the depth of questioning to which his family, in particular his two wives, would be subjected by a colonial officer.

It is impossible to know what proportion of suicide cases reached the coroners' courts of Nyasaland in this period. Practical implementation of the ordinance would have been hindered by the remoteness of many rural communities, especially in the northern parts of the country, and by poor communications. Medical officers were extremely thin on the ground, and it became clear quite early on that the demand that all bodies of people who had died suspiciously should be medically examined was impractical. What is more difficult to discern is the degree of resistance, reluctance or cooperation offered by Nyasaland villagers to those attempting to enforce the ordinance. Village communities, then and now, had their own forms of 'inquest' into deaths that appeared unnatural or unexpected. A dead body could not be easily hidden from public scrutiny, and with the exception of the very elderly,

most deaths attracted some kind of questioning attention.²⁸ But what evidence we have also suggests that, to varying degrees, communities in Nyasaland traditionally buried the bodies of suicides quickly, with abbreviated rites. In this context, we can assume that many would have regarded the medical examination of the body and an autopsy (though this happened more rarely) with fear, if not horror. Nyasaland, like other parts of the region, was rife with 'bloodsucking' rumours, some of which directly implicated the agents of the colonial state.²⁹ Interference with dead bodies, particularly those of suicide cases, was a serious matter. All of these considerations lead us to conclude that many, if not most, suicide cases would have been hidden and would not have reached the colonial coroners' courts.

The fact that these were colonial courts, presided over by a representative of the late colonial state, raises further important issues. In their study of suicide in early modern England, Michael MacDonald and Terence Murphy employed the records of coroners' courts precisely because they were local institutions, composed of ordinary men, and therefore revealing of changing public reactions to suicidal deaths.³⁰ The proceedings of colonial courts cannot be assumed to have expressed the legitimate views of the communities they served, particularly in the period when many Nyasaland subjects were actively protesting against the intervention of the colonial state in their daily lives.³¹ It goes without saying, then, that these court records need to be read with sensitivity to the suspicion, anxiety and fear that many participants probably experienced when their most intimate family affairs, and their grief, were subjected to a colonial inquisition. Despite the obvious power asymmetries at work, however, it is important not to assume that these records are the product of a self-evidently antagonistic encounter between colonial rulers on the one hand and hostile subjects on the other.

Merely correcting for colonial 'bias' would not be an adequate approach to this evidence. By the late 1940s, many people in Nyasaland identified to some degree with the modernizing ambitions of the late colonial state, some while simultaneously protesting against colonial rule. Nyasaland's local educated elite were for the most part modernizing Christians, keen to reform their societies and to distance themselves from a range of 'traditional' beliefs and practices, including witchcraft. Suicides were often connected to witchcraft accusations within communities and families, or to the transgression of traditional taboos. Insofar as colonial inquests and post-mortems offered an alternative analysis, their proceedings may, at times, have been welcomed, although it is not possible to argue this with any certainty.³² Colonial administrators who acted as coroners do not appear to have had any specific mission to uncover and adjudicate suicide cases. Suicides came to their attention by default rather than by intention. Communities in Nyasaland shared the general view of most communities, and of their colonial rulers, that suicide was a highly regrettable occurrence. There was, in other words, no 'clash of cultures' at this very general level, although there may have been a great many misunderstandings, mistranslations and straightforward incomprehension in specific courtroom exchanges. It must be borne in mind that colonial coroners were in practice heavily dependent on the African intermediaries who presented evidence to them, and to varying degrees on translators.³³ In some cases, colonial coroners appear to have been keen to make their personal views on cases known, but in many more they were content to bow to local judgement on these matters, as long as this was compatible with the law. Under colonial law, attempted suicide was a crime, but colonial coroners appear to have had little appetite for enforcing this aspect of the law. There were no particular financial consequences for families if a person

was found by the court to have committed suicide, and if any shame attached to the family of a suicide, it was likely to have been experienced with or without the coroner's verdict.³⁴ In short, colonial coroners did not approach these cases with any obvious agenda, either to criminalize suicide or to 'enlighten' local views of suicide.

Of the total of 123 cases in the sample under consideration here, ninety were cases of male suicide and thirty-three were cases of female suicide – a ratio that accords fairly well with global figures. With very few exceptions, both men and women committed suicide by hanging themselves, often with homemade pieces of rope and string, or sometimes with belts. So clear was the association between 'rope' and suicide that if people who appeared unhappy or unwell were seen with a piece of rope or string, they were followed and monitored by family members. While both women and men hanged themselves, it is striking that women usually took themselves away, to their gardens or into the bush, before killing themselves, while men were most often found hanged inside or very close to their houses. Drawing any conclusions from this fact would be hazardous, but it would appear that this was a more public act for men than it was for women, and that women may have been more sensitive to the possibility that their bodies might pollute the home and harm their families.

There are no 'typical' suicide cases, but the death of James Malunga, whose body we have already encountered, is not untypical. Malunga, whose age was estimated at around fifty-four, was described as belonging to the Yao ethnic group, which dominated the southern end of the Lake Malawi region where he lived. His body was found by his wife Amana early in the morning, hanging from a tree not far from their house. His daughter ran to the village headman to tell him what had happened, and the headman sent a message to the chief, Native

Authority Kalembo. When Kalembo's head court messenger arrived for work that morning, he was told by the chief to fetch the dispenser from the clinic and go with him to the neighbouring village to investigate a suicide. In his evidence to the court, the messenger said that he had gone to the village with the dispenser and inspected the body of Malunga, who was known to him, then returned to the chief's headquarters. The chief had told him to report the matter to the authorities at Fort Johnston. The dispenser wrote a letter to the medical officer. The messenger then travelled to Fort Johnston (presumably by bicycle, though we are not told) and delivered the letter to a police officer before returning to Kalembo. Later that day the medical officer, Alexander Holmes, arrived at the village from Fort Johnston with a European police officer and an African constable, Michael Phiri. Phiri later reported to the court that on arrival in the village, he removed the body from the house and took it to the tree where it had been found. He measured the distance between the ground and the branch from which it had been found hanging and inspected the body for any marks. He also measured the distance between the house and the tree. He then drew a sketch map of the scene. While the medical officer examined the body, Phiri talked to witnesses and seems to have begun a line of questioning that later became central to the inquest.

I was told by the younger brother of the deceased that he had two wives and this was the first wife he was with at the time of his death. He also told me that he had gone to his second wife two weeks ago and had recently been brought back by his daughters because he had been unsettled in his mind, not speaking properly. We also called the second wife of the deceased and she confirmed that he had not been well when he was staying with her, and had not been speaking properly. She did not tell us in what way he had been speaking abnormally.

In court, the question of Malunga's state of mind in relation to his second marriage was taken up and pursued. Both wives were questioned. His first wife, to whom he had been married for thirty-six years, said that her husband had only recently taken a second wife, and that when he returned from the other woman's home, he 'looked ill' and 'spoke with unconnected words, like a child'. In every other way, she said, he appeared normal. Malunga's second wife told the court:

My husband came to live with us about three weeks ago. I had not known him for very long before we were married, only about three weeks before he came to live with me ... When my husband came to live with me he seemed well, but one day after he came he complained that his heart was not well. At this time he did not show any strangeness in his speech, but after three days he said he wished to go to his first wife as his heart was not well, but he did not go. He remained at my house for three weeks and he seemed all right all that time and did not [seem] to have anything wrong with his speech ... We never had any trouble between ourselves or any quarrels. He did not speak to me of any worry or trouble that was on his mind. I cannot think of any reason why the deceased, my husband, should have committed suicide, and I am quite sure that I never noticed any strangeness in my husband's speech, all the time he was with me.

The evidence of the medical report was conclusive that this was a case of suicide, but the coroner pursued the question of Malunga's mental state at the time. In part this can be explained by the fact that the coroner had the option of ruling that Malunga had committed suicide 'while the balance of his mind was disturbed', although it is not at all clear that this verdict would have made any material difference to the family

or to anyone else. Rather, it seems that the evidence first collected from the witnesses by the African constable, Phiri, had set in motion a quest for understanding on the part of the coroner. This quest centred on whether Malunga's speech was impaired when he returned from his second wife's home. For the coroner, this would have been evidence of possible insanity. The witnesses, however, would have been more likely to interpret it as evidence that someone, perhaps one of his wives, had bewitched him. The testimony of Malunga's younger brother, filling out the picture of Malunga's state of mind, bridges these two interpretations:

I often saw my brother during these last years and I knew he had taken a second wife. I visited my brother once when he was living with his second wife and he seemed quite well then. I know that my brother was worried because his first wife did not wish him to marry again. The Village Headman and myself were agreeing that it was all right for any husband to take another wife but I do not know why he wished to do so. There were no quarrels between my brother and his first wife on this subject. My brother once told me that his heart was not well but I never noticed anything else about his health. All the family were agreeing to his new marriage, except his first wife. I cannot think of any reason why he would commit suicide, except that he was worried his first wife did not agree to the marriage.

In Malunga's brother's testimony, a picture emerges of a troubled man who, despite having gone through all the appropriate customary procedures, was worried that by taking a new (and presumably younger) wife, he was in some way harming his first wife. Since his brother, his first wife, and other members of his family declared themselves to the court to be Muslims, we can probably assume that Malunga was also

a Muslim, so there is no question here of Christian guilt over polygamy. Nevertheless, he seems to have been deeply concerned. Several witnesses recalled that he had told them that his 'heart was not well', which was a translation of a common term in chiYao (and other local languages) referring to what we might call emotional or psychological disturbance.³⁵ Malunga's brother mentions in his testimony both this aspect of the case and the evidence of Malunga's strange speech patterns, implying that his understanding of Malunga's problems encompassed both a sense of internalized guilt and anxiety and also the possibility that some supernatural force was at work, possibly a curse. Different witnesses placed different weight on different aspects of the case. Malunga's second wife strenuously denied that he had developed problems with his speech while staying with her, while his first wife emphasized that point.

The coroner, Arthur Clayton, recorded a verdict of suicide without further comment. Later he was mildly reprimanded by the attorney general, who wrote on the cover letter to the record of the case: 'Please inform the Coroner that at the conclusion of the evidence he should record a short summary of the evidence and his verdict thereon (Jervis, on Coroners, 8th Edition, p. 114.)'. Perhaps Clayton was sensitive enough to conclude that the complex reasons behind Malunga's suicide were not easily reducible to a 'short summary of the evidence'. The historian rereading the evidence, however, should take heed. Not all colonial coroners were as circumspect as Clayton was in this case. Many summed up their cases with quite lengthy speculations on the psychodynamics of their subjects. For example, at the conclusion of another case in which polygamy was deemed relevant, the coroner wrote:

Alicia Banda's whole outlook on life was completely altered when her husband married another younger woman after he

had been married to her alone for 20 years. I realise of course that to marry more than one wife is quite normal in any village of the tribes found in this district, but at the same time this man had remained monogamous for a long time before marrying again. The husband is not a young man and now too old to go to Southern Rhodesia or South Africa to work. His deceased wife no doubt thought he would settle down (or had settled down – he last returned from South Africa in 1945) and quietly spend the rest of his life with her in the village. He no doubt gave most of his attention to his new wife. This was too much for his old wife who ceased to speak with people in the village. When she was left alone all day, probably just with the children, whilst all the other adults went (of all things!) to a funeral, she took the opportunity of creeping away into the bush and taking her own life, in the only way she knew.³⁶

These empathetic considerations led the coroner to conclude that Alicia Banda had committed suicide ‘whilst her mind was temporarily disturbed’. In another case focused on marital relations, from 1966 (by which time Nyasaland had become independent as Malawi), the coroner, who was of Nigerian origin, reflected at length on the pain of loneliness experienced by an elderly man who had been abandoned by his wife: ‘The deceased was not used to being left alone. He had enjoyed the company of his wife for such a time that at the declining age of 70 years to be left alone without any comfort was too hard for him to bear and so he committed suicide’.³⁷

Marital relationships feature centrally in around a quarter of the 123 cases, although often in conjunction with other factors. Placing cases into broad sociological categories is already making assumptions about the very history under investigation here. Nevertheless, if we are going to attempt any analysis of the relationship between individual dynamics

and social context, then a degree of initial crude categorization is unavoidable. Precisely because marriage was such a central institution of life in Nyasaland, it was also often a source of tension. Different marriage forms existed in different parts of the country, but all had in common the close involvement of kin. In some of the cases described here, especially those from southern parts of the territory, a matrilineal form of kinship dominated and matrilineal marriage was the norm. Elsewhere, particularly in the north, marriage was patrilineal and secured by bridewealth payments. Although there were distinct and important differences between these broadly defined marital regimes, in practice these systems were more flexible than standard colonial anthropological accounts tended to imply. Indeed, in late colonial Nyasaland, the demands of a changing economy, and particularly of labour migration and land shortage, necessitated flexibility in the marriage system.³⁸

Different systems also shared the assumption that the central function of marriage was the production of children. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that many cases of suicide involved tensions within marriage, and pressures on individuals, arising from male impotence, (assumed) female infertility and the deaths of children. Such cases often overlapped in complex ways, with accusations of adultery and fears of witchcraft. They were also frequently inseparable from guilt. For example, one man committed suicide in front of his five children after confessing that he had been committing adultery with his sister-in-law. The crucial fact that emerged from the evidence was that his wife was in the early stages of pregnancy at the time. Male adultery during a wife's pregnancy was thought to be harmful to the unborn child. The man had done the right thing by confessing and by offering to obtain a local medicine for his wife that would ensure the baby's safety, but as the coroner concluded, it seemed that a sense of remorse had overwhelmed him.³⁹ In an unusually explicit suicide note,

another man explained that he had been the victim of a jealous woman's witchcraft powers. In love with one woman and intending to marry her, he had slept with another. It was, he said, just a brief, unimportant affair, but she thought otherwise and had rendered him impotent, making it impossible now for him to marry his girlfriend. 'It's with deep regret,' he wrote, 'that I am bidding farewell to all my relatives. I am sad to inform you that I am dead, stay well. I hold the woman responsible for my death, and as you can see, she has cut my life short.'⁴⁰

Many cases told a story of men's anger with and violence against their wives, sometimes induced by an accusation or suspicion of adultery, often aggravated by alcohol. The fact that these particular cases culminated in male suicides makes them unusual but also revealing.⁴¹ There is nothing specific to the societies of colonial Nyasaland about the sequence of events in which a man arrives home from a beer-drinking party, complains that there is insufficient food to eat and then beats his wife, sometimes murdering her.⁴² Men's anger at women and frustration at the poverty of their households emerges clearly from these accounts, but the fact that some men went on to kill themselves after these incidents reveals an additional dimension of anxiety about how their actions would be judged within their communities. One woman recalled the sequence of events that led her husband to kill himself. One day he accused her of committing adultery and beat her on the backs of her hands: 'I was not hurt, but I cried ... We both sat on the verandah. My husband said that he was sorry. He said that if people saw me crying like that they would think that he was not a good husband. He seemed sorry and ashamed.' The woman reported the beating to the senior relatives who acted as advisers to the marriage, known as *ankhoswe*. She then returned home and the two of them fell asleep, but in the middle of the night she awoke to find her

husband cutting her ear. She screamed. Her brother heard her, ran in from a neighbouring hut, and took her to hospital. The next day her husband hanged himself.⁴³ Another woman recalled how she and her husband had often quarrelled because they had no children, but 'even when we were quarrelling, my husband was very fond of me'. Each time they quarrelled, things were 'patched up' by the *ankhoswe*, but one weekend things came to a head and, tired of hearing her husband call her 'bad names', she left the home to go and stay with her grandfather, intending to return later. Her husband killed himself a few days later.⁴⁴

Men who were angry with their wives sometimes became violent against them and then turned their anger on themselves. Other men committed suicide as a result of grief over the deaths of their wives. A young woman from Cholo district described how, after the death of her mother, her father 'has been caring for nothing and only eating a little food'. Samuel told his workmates that he wanted to kill himself because his wife had died. His European employer 'told him to be reasonable and pointed out his responsibilities to him, but he did not appear to be much impressed'. Samuel killed himself later that day.⁴⁵

Powerful feelings were not confined to marital relations. Conflict with parents, siblings, children and in-laws features in many cases, alongside grief. Sometimes these cases were compounded by accusations of witchcraft, most of which were directed at women. Josiah killed himself after a quarrel with his father at a beer-drinking party. In the course of the argument, he had accused his father of favouring his sister, while his father had accused him of being a witch and 'making magic by night'.⁴⁶ Witchcraft featured explicitly in ten cases, but was implied in many others. Apparently terrified by the consequences of a witchcraft accusation, or in anticipation of one, some people decided to end their own lives. Alisia, for

example, killed herself after her husband accused her of bewitching his pregnant second wife.⁴⁷

Some women were implicated in the deaths of their own children. In communities where infant and child mortality rates were high, the death of a child may have been a regular occurrence, but it could still be devastating. After eight of her children had died, one woman took the ritual poison *mwabvi*, traditionally used to detect witches, and died. The coroner, convinced that 'the accuser of witchcraft was the deceased herself', passed (perhaps controversially) a sentence of suicide.⁴⁸ Another woman hanged herself shortly after her small son died of pneumonia. She had lost six other children previously. According to the coroner, the boy could have been saved if his parents had sought medical treatment, provoking him to reflect that this was 'one of the many tragedies which occur in African villages as a result of ignorance and fear'.⁴⁹ A woman in Blantyre district described to the inquest how her daughter had anxiously nursed her sick nine-month-old child, who died after a few days. As the woman was laying out the child's body, her daughter ran out of the hut; she was later found hanged in the garden. Her husband told the court that they had two other children and that 'my wife was so full of grief she did not properly know what she was doing'.⁵⁰ A young woman described how her sister, who had four children, was devastated by the illness of her only daughter, telling her, 'If my daughter dies I will die. If it was a boy it would not matter so much, but this is my only daughter.' The child died the next day, and the sister killed herself immediately after the funeral.⁵¹

A picture emerges from these cases of close communities and dense networks of relationships. Close relationships were clearly essential to individual well-being, but they were also the cause of anguish.⁵² Few conflicts were 'private', and so any shameful event within a family, or implication of wrongdoing, was liable to be reflected in an individual's social reputation.

But many cases also demonstrate that conflict, death and transgressive behaviour could induce powerful feelings of individual guilt and remorse. A significant number of inquests in this sample are built around narratives that privilege economic factors. Rural society in Nyasaland in this period was increasingly differentiated.⁵³ Some households had become wealthier than their neighbours as a result of success in cash-crop production or access to education and wage employment. Others struggled to survive. Extreme poverty was shameful, reflecting on the moral reputations of both men and women. Women who could not put together a 'decent' meal every day were likely to incur the anger of their husbands, but they could also attract either the disapproval or the support of their neighbours, depending on how they were viewed as individuals. Poverty was familiar in Nyasaland, but destitution was relatively rare and occurred only when economic vulnerability combined with social ostracism, or during an unusually severe famine, such as that of 1949.⁵⁴

The tax demands of the colonial state not only added to the economic pressures on poor households (although tax exemptions did exist for the sick and elderly), but also made their poverty very public. Jeannie's husband was a tax defaulter. They had been married since she was a young girl and had five living children (two others had died). In more than fifteen years, he had never paid his tax, she said, and he had always run away from home at the time of tax collection, so that it was she who was arrested by the tax *askari* or police. She lived in visible poverty, and her house was falling down. Eventually the village headman took matters into his own hands and reported to the chief that Jeannie was 'husbandless' and therefore should not be pursued for tax. Jeannie's husband was unhappy with this 'divorce', but his brother told him that if he wanted the marriage restored, he would have to pay the tax owed, and then his name could once more be entered in

the tax ledger as a 'husband'. On one or two occasions thereafter, usually when drunk, the husband was seen 'making ropes' (that is, preparing for his suicide). His friends took the ropes away from him, but eventually he succeeded in hanging himself.⁵⁵

Most cases of suicide of the very poor also featured some element of ill health.⁵⁶ Of the 123 total cases, twenty featured a physical illness of some description, and a further twelve concerned individuals who were defined by witnesses as 'insane'.⁵⁷ When people were chronically ill or disabled, they also ceased to be economically active and were therefore dependent on their relatives and neighbours. Although this form of social support was the norm in these communities, high levels of dependency did not always come without psychological consequences. Witnesses typically described men who had formerly been active breadwinners for their families reduced to 'just hoeing', or worse unable to do anything at all. Some were wracked by pain; others had their mobility reduced by illnesses such as leprosy.⁵⁸ Young men returned from stints as labour migrants in Southern Rhodesia and South Africa with industrial injuries. Others were repatriated because of their disturbed behaviour and subsequently killed themselves. Some elderly people grew 'tired' of the struggle to live. One elderly woman committed suicide immediately after the funeral of her niece, who had been her caregiver.⁵⁹ Witness after witness described their efforts to care for and comfort the physically ill, or to accommodate the behaviour of the mentally disturbed. Maria's husband, who was around sixty years of age, suffered from both leprosy and epilepsy. He had lost a toe and was unable to work. One day, after experiencing a fit, he told his wife, 'I have suffered so much and I do not know what to do.' She replied, 'Don't worry, this sickness has come to you and we will have to wait to see what God does.' That night they did

not go to sleep but sat 'discussing his troubles'. In the morning he seemed 'very depressed' and ate only a little food, 'looking at the ground'. Later that day, he was found hanged.⁶⁰

Although ill health and poverty provided the context for a substantial proportion of the suicides in this sample, other cases featured more successful members of society and the pressures consequent on their involvement in the cash economy. Worry about debt was mentioned by witnesses as the salient fact in several cases of the more economically successful. Cases of debt were closely connected to social reputation, and were sometimes compounded by allegations of financial impropriety in church and professional associations that had sprung up among Nyasaland's educated elite. A man in Mzimba district committed suicide after accidentally burning down a neighbour's maize store and the church where he was an elder.⁶¹ Another man was troubled by a debt of four pounds. His creditor had threatened to 'take him to the Boma and sell him there as a slave'.⁶² A prominent schoolteacher killed himself after allegations of misuse of funds connected to the Teachers' Association, of which he was an officer. He left a number of suicide notes, in which he strenuously denied that he was responsible for any wrongdoing but implied, nevertheless, that the financial problems of the association had brought shame on him, his family and the church of which he was a member. Rather than give evidence in the case, he had decided to end his life. To his colleagues he wrote:

Always a teacher does not stand before a Court and give a false statement ... I did not take anything belonging to the Association. You members will witness me. My life is going to come to an end in order that Mr Harry may speak about this case of his happily. Let the judges not trouble my wife as she knows nothing about my death ... there is a clear reason, that is I may put the Mission to shame by giving

evidence about this case. It was not necessary to do so but it is on account of being ashamed as stated above.⁶³

He wrote a separate letter to his wife, instructing her to 'keep my children comfortable' and (somewhat ironically) telling her not to give up hope because 'there are troubles but there is always a chance in future'. In two letters he referred specifically to the way his body should be treated after his death: 'I pray you not to trouble my body' and 'Do not allow my body to be troubled. I shall be buried where my father was buried'. These were probably references to traditional practices related to the treatment of the corpses of suicides, which were feared and sometimes buried away from the village.⁶⁴ This was an unusual example of a highly literate person attempting to employ the suicide note to determine how his death would be interpreted.

The suicide notes of the literate add a particular dimension of reflexivity to the archive, as has been noted for other contexts and times.⁶⁵ But most were in fact very brief instructions on the disposal of property or lists of money owed and owing – simple wills, in effect. Some notes consisted of one phrase along the lines of 'I am going, goodbye' or 'Dear Mother, I have gone, I have killed myself'.⁶⁶ Very few explicitly blamed others for leading them to suicide, but there were some that, though oblique, appear to be accusatory: 'I am very sorry, mother, misunderstanding always leads to bad things. When child tells out what makes him angry, it is always better to appease him'.⁶⁷

Although the precise relationship between social context and an individual's decision to take his or her own life remains inaccessible, it is clear that people in the communities featured in these inquest records attributed agency to those who committed suicide, but to varying degrees, depending on the circumstances. When supernatural forces were invoked in

these narratives of suicide, it was in relation to individual dynamics. Honour, shame and reputation emerge as strong elements in these stories, but so does guilt. In their review of the suicide literature on Africa, Collomb and Collignon argued that African societies were 'shame' societies rather than 'guilt' societies, but it is hard to disentangle these two elements in the material presented here.⁶⁸ There is certainly plenty of evidence of individuals being 'unwell in the heart' and falling into dejection and introspective despondency, although whether this can (or should) be labelled 'clinical depression' is a complex, important question and not for the historian to decide. Rather than employ this material as evidence for the incidence of a pathological condition, perhaps we can read it more productively by viewing it as one element in a complex history of subjectivity.

It is quite obviously the case that the nature of the colonial inquest and the procedures and investigations leading up to it privileged some forms of evidence and explanation over others.⁶⁹ Apart from medical and other physical evidence, the inquest produced a kind of forensic psychology, which invited speculation on the inner workings of the individual's mind and which may well have downplayed other factors present in the thoughts of witnesses (if not of the suicidal individuals themselves), particularly spiritual beliefs. The inquest, in common with other legal procedures, required that witnesses produce linear and consistent narratives. Although there are very few cases in this sample in which homicide was openly suspected, we can assume that in many others witnesses felt that they were under suspicion or were being implicitly blamed for events. Their accounts, therefore, are likely to have placed more emphasis on the independent agency of the person committing suicide than they might have done in another context.

How far the inquisitorial system itself influenced local attitudes toward suicide in this period is impossible to know.

Certainly it would be too simplistic to argue that this is a story of either the 'medicalization' or the 'secularization' of suicide in colonial Africa. It seems likely, however, that the processes and procedures of the inquest system have had some influence on ideas about suicide in these societies, an issue that I explore in the next section of this chapter.

The Rediscovery of Suicide in Africa: Social Crisis or Moral Panic?

In an extreme example of the black humour that sometimes manifests itself in contemporary Africa, Ted Malanda, writing in *The Standard* in April 2010, mocked his fellow Kenyans' ineptitude at ending their own lives and suggested a number of foolproof methods of dying. Getting yourself killed in Kenya, he implied, was absurdly straightforward: walk into a political rally wearing the shirt of the opposing party, or run down a crowded street in Nairobi looking like a thief.⁷⁰ Death, Malanda suggests, is so easy to come by in Kenya, there is no need to go to the trouble of killing yourself. But black humour usually reflects some very real anxiety and Malanda's joke can be read as symptomatic of a more general concern over the incidence of suicide that has been evident in the Kenyan press in the last few years. This anxiety is not confined to Kenya. Similar concerns have surfaced in the press in Uganda, Malawi, Botswana and South Africa.⁷¹ The perception that suicide is on the increase in the region is widely reflected in press reports, along with a sense that suicide is itself a symptom of a wider social and moral malaise. However, the meanings attributed to suicide as a social phenomenon in popular discourse vary across the region, as I will show.

An examination of press reports of suicide demonstrates a recognition that the meanings of, and motivations for, suicide

are diverse and complex. Though a 'secular' interpretation, heavily influenced by both (broadly Durkheimian) sociological theories and a variety of psychological ideas, appears to be gaining ground, this has not completely overwhelmed other understandings. Certainly, suicide for many people in the region (as elsewhere in the world) remains an issue with profound moral and religious consequences. Indeed, the perception that suicide rates are increasing rapidly has produced a variety of 'moral panics'.

Botswana's version of this is perhaps the most publicized and the most studied.⁷² Here, in a country widely regarded as the continent's greatest economic and political 'success story', suicide rates (particularly amongst young men) appear to have been rising at an alarming rate since the turn of the millennium. Indeed, if figures quoted in the local press are correct, Botswana now has one of the highest suicide rates in the world.⁷³ A wave of so-called 'passion killings' (better described as intimate femicides followed by suicides) hit the headlines in the local press in 2005. By and large these reports focused on the suicides of the young men involved, rather than on the murders they had committed.⁷⁴ In the press there was disagreement on the causes of this phenomenon. The political opposition blamed poverty, while others blamed the consequences of Botswana's economic 'miracle', the decline of traditional family structures and (in a classic instance of victim blaming) the ruthless materialism of 'gold-digging' women, but as Livingston points out, 'passion killings' comprise just one of a number of 'genres' of suicide in contemporary Botswana. The others include suicides of HIV/AIDS patients, the suicides of 'abandoned lovers', of 'alienated urbanites', of 'disgruntled teenagers' and lonely and stressed university students. Through these 'tales' of (undoubtedly very real) suicides, Livingston argues, Botswanans appear to reflect the 'dark side' of their country's 'miracle' status and the perils of the liberal market economy.⁷⁵

The generalized consequences of 'modernization', and of HIV/AIDS, also feature in accounts of an apparent increase in suicide in Uganda. In August 2007 a leading newspaper published an extended discussion of suicide, and quoted a survey carried out in Kampala that had apparently recorded a doubling of the suicide rate from 1.31 per 100,000 in 1980 to 2.34 per 100,000 in 2004.⁷⁶ This is clearly a much lower rate than that reported for Botswana and, indeed, is well below the global average suicide rate of 16 per 100,000. But that is perhaps not so obvious to Ugandans experiencing an apparently marked increase in suicides. Suicide and attempted suicide are criminal offences in Uganda, as they are in most African countries, and this is widely thought to lead to under-reporting. Quoting the leader of the Kampala study's research team, the Ugandan press report concentrated on economic and 'lifestyle' changes as sources of the increase, echoing some of the broadly Durkheimian discourse evident in Botswana and other parts of the region:

As the economy becomes more cash based, psychosocial distress is mounting on those who cannot raise enough to earn a decent living ... Modern life puts pressures on men to earn income and when that is not forthcoming they get depressed.⁷⁷

This discourse on 'modernization' and the dangers of creeping social anomie is certainly very evident in discussions of suicide in the region, but if a sociological discourse is readily employed, religious leaders often also use the press to articulate an alternative interpretation. In the Ugandan case, a month after this report was published the Archbishop of Uganda added his voice to the growing debate, criticizing the implication that poverty was some sort of justification for taking one's own life. Suicide, he said, was a 'barbaric' way of solving problems:

‘Just fight poverty by thinking and working hard. Does one get money after killing himself/herself?’⁷⁸ In Zambia, a recent reported rise in suicide cases on the Copperbelt prompted the local police chief to express shock that there were so many suicides in a ‘Christian nation’ and to call on church leaders to ‘make people aware that there is a solution or help to every problem rather than resorting to suicide’.⁷⁹ Employing a more forgiving discourse that combines secular psychological and spiritual interpretations, Bishop Ndlovu of the Bible Gospel Church in Africa responded to this call with a gentle reminder to Christians that suicide is a sin but also with a commitment to a form of ‘spiritual counselling’:

I agree with the sentiments of the Copperbelt police chief. It’s only the church that can play a major role of transformation, as suicide starts from the heart and when there are such negative thoughts brewing internally, it is important that spiritual intervention takes place so that they can be aborted from the bosom of the heart before one can attempt to claim their lives.⁸⁰

Across the region there are reports of the suicides of teenage schoolchildren and university students, reflecting a wide concern with relations between the generations, authority, and the harmful side-effects of a society which apparently increasingly values individual financial and professional achievement above all else.⁸¹ In Kenya, some sensationalist reporting of individual suicides sits alongside more sober reflections on, for example, the incidence of suicide amongst farmers affected by the recent drought who are unable to repay their loans. In Malawi, alongside cases involving jealous husbands in suicides or murder-suicides, and of the suicides of teenagers and students, was a case in 2010 that dominated the local media for two weeks. This involved the apparent

suicide (reported as a 'religious suicide') of three young people allegedly encouraged to take their own lives by the teachings of the church to which they belonged. The reporting of this case linked this case with a long-standing belief in the role of witchcraft in suicides and with a very specific concern with witchcraft in the Ndirande area where the incident took place. In addition the press coverage reflected an unease with the role of the ever-expanding number evangelical churches in the country, and with what was termed an 'unMalawian' failure of community and law enforcement.⁸²

As this brief review of press reporting in the region shows, though there are some common themes (social anomie, financial pressures, 'modern life' and the consequences of urbanization), the stories that are told about suicide develop into 'genres' that are often inflected by national concerns and histories. While some of the 'genres' of suicide reporting in the region's press are long-standing ones, predating the existence of a written medium (jealous lovers, bewitchment), others clearly reflect contemporary concerns and, most significantly, new meanings of suicide derived from the work of psychiatry and psychology professionals. Professional interest in suicide in Eastern and Southern Africa has been increasing in the last decade and new research findings are often quoted (or misquoted) in the press. The 'medicalization' of suicide, however, is not itself a completely uniform process.

Psychiatry professionals based in Uganda and Kenya have played a central role in the generation of new research on suicide in the region. Professor Ndeti, founding Director of the African Mental Health Foundation in Nairobi, has published widely on suicide (amongst other topics) and was a key figure in the establishment of an African Suicide Research Network.⁸³ He was also instrumental in setting up a branch of the Samaritans in Kenya. Ndeti's pioneering work is well known in Kenya and is widely quoted in the local press. For example,

in July 2011 *The Standard* published an article under the heading 'Experts Raise Alarm Over Rising Cases of Suicide' quoting Professor Ndeti at length.⁸⁴ In Uganda, Dr Eugene Kinyanda and his colleagues have carried out research on various aspects of suicide and depressive illness. His work is also frequently quoted in the Ugandan press and it was his report on suicide in urban Kampala (see above) that sparked significant media interest in suicide in 2007.⁸⁵ East African psychiatry professionals believe strongly that both suicide and depressive illness are increasing problems and ones which have been previously neglected, in part because of the legacy of colonial thinking on African psychology and the application of culturally inappropriate diagnostic tools, and in part due to the chronic underfunding of mental health services in the region. They generally hold the view (supported by evidence) that the stigma attached to mental illness is also present in relation to depressive conditions and to suicide. It follows from this that bringing these subjects more fully 'into the open' must be a positive move, and one that might aid in the prevention of suicide.⁸⁶ But of course they cannot completely control the ways in which their research is reported on by the press and understood by a larger public. In their professional publications, psychiatrists and psychologists are very clear about the inadequacies of the data available for an epidemiological study of suicide in the region. But this does not prevent their findings often being reinterpreted as demonstrating conclusively that rates of suicide are massively increasing. Similarly, though their analyses are multifaceted, making it clear that there is no simple way of explaining the combinations of social and individual factors that produce suicidal acts, perhaps inevitably this complexity is lost in the temptation to characterize suicide as a sign of social and moral disintegration.

For the most part the recent East African research approaches suicide in terms of its relationship with undiagnosed

depressive illness, and within the context of a rapidly 'modernizing' society and economy that renders some individuals vulnerable to being 'victims' of suicidal thinking. In South Africa, though these elements are also present, and there are other common concerns (for example, the question of youth suicides) in general the 'discovery' of suicide has been linked to the high rates of violence in the country. Uniquely in the region, the study of suicide in South Africa benefits both from a system of data collection that has vastly improved in recent years, and from a small but important literature on the history of suicide in that country.⁸⁶ As far as I can discern, South Africa is the only country in East and Southern Africa to gather mortality statistics of a kind that allow for evidence-based statements on the incidence of suicide and (to a lesser extent) on changes over time. But the nature of the statistical record in South Africa is clearly marked by the country's history and in particular by a concern with 'race' and, especially since the ending of the apartheid regime, with violence. Though suicide rates remain highest for the 'white' population, there is general agreement in the South African literature that apartheid period statistics were particularly unreliable for mortality in the 'black' population and almost certainly underestimated suicide rates in the African population. There is also general agreement that the suicide rate amongst black men is increasing.⁸⁷ An exceptionally high overall suicide rate (38.6 per 100,000) was recorded in 2000 in the Umtata area of the Transkei. Two-thirds of these deaths were of young adults.⁸⁸

The current literature on suicide in South Africa bears some resemblance to the historical literature on suicide amongst the African-American population of the United States. There are two respects in which this is the case. As in the US in the 1960s and 1970s, professionals in South Africa in the 1990s and 2000s have 'discovered' black suicide.⁸⁹ Secondly, the analysis of suicide in contemporary South Africa has largely been

contextualized within the study of violence and 'life-threatening' behaviours, ranging from alcoholism to reckless driving.⁹⁰ In this, too, the current psycho-sociological analysis of suicide in South Africa is similar to that which has dominated the literature on suicide amongst African-Americans. The central critique of this approach is that by subsuming suicide in a larger analysis of 'social problems', African-Americans were denied agency and meaning in their own suicides, and that this in itself is a legacy of racist thinking.⁹¹

There is a particular genealogy of racial thinking on suicide in South Africa, and a marked tendency to view the rising rate of suicide among young black males within the larger context of high rates of violence and violent death. Race was the predominant category of analysis in suicide studies in South Africa, overshadowing alternative ways of interpreting the phenomenon. Since the ending of apartheid, violence has to some extent taken over that role, and now frames the study of self-destruction. One should not, however, oversimplify. Firstly, we must acknowledge that South Africa's extraordinarily high rates of violence, including the violence of self-destruction, do call out for some kind of historical and sociological analysis. Secondly, individual psychology is not completely ignored in South African suicide studies. Indeed, the study of suicide in South Africa is far more developed than in any other country in the region, and has to a large extent been driven by clinical psychologists.⁹² South African psychologists see suicide not only through the lens of the statistics that class it as just one form of violent death, but also in relation to mental illness and depressive conditions.

Strikingly absent in the recent surge of literature on suicide in the region are in-depth or social anthropological studies. Hence, international overviews of suicide such as Baudelot and Establet's continue to cite Paul Bohannan's 1960 edited volume on homicide and suicide in Africa for its social anthropological

insights into the meanings and understandings of suicide on the continent.⁹³ Beginning to fill this gap is the work of a group of researchers in Uganda who have been carrying out studies on attitudes to suicide and have also employed the 'psychological post-mortem' methodology.⁹⁴ But the paucity of 'qualitative' research on suicide, when combined with the absence of reliable statistics in most countries, seriously limits the ability of researchers to draw conclusions on the critical relationship between the sociological and psychological factors that combine to produce patterns of suicide, and on the meanings ascribed to suicide in contemporary African societies.

A Small-Scale Study in Malawi

In 2008, in tandem with historical research on suicide inquests, I initiated a small-scale study of attitudes to suicide in Malawi. As discussed earlier in this chapter, one of the issues that had come to the fore in my analysis of inquest records from the late colonial period (and which has been noted by historians working on very different times and places) was the impact of a state-run inquisitorial system on the ways in which communities understood and interpreted suicide cases. My hope was that even a small-scale study might shed light on the ways in which people frame the issue of suicide in present-day Malawi, and that this might be compared with the results of my analysis of cases from the 1940s and 1950s.

Malawi, in common with other countries in the region, appears to be experiencing an increased interest in suicide both in the local press and within its very small community of psychiatry professionals. Newspaper reports lament the apparent increased tendency for Malawians to take their own lives and sensationalize individual cases, often employing them in a commentary both on the stresses of modern-day life and the

apparent irrationality of individuals. Psychiatry and psychology professionals lament the absence of statistics on suicide and express the view that suicide cases are grossly under-reported. For them, the neglect of suicide as an issue is closely tied to the much larger neglect of mental health problems in the country.⁹⁵ The only existing study of suicide in Malawi is an analysis based on a 'retrospective audit' of cases handled by mortuaries in the city of Blantyre between January 2000 and December 2003.⁹⁶ The researchers reviewed the mortuary records of all suicide cases and analysed them by age, sex, residential location and mode of suicide. They found that suicide cases represented seventeen per cent of all autopsies carried out, that men were far more likely to commit suicide than women (in line with global norms), and that the most common mode of suicide was chemical poisoning using agricultural pesticide.⁹⁷ Though the mortuary records were found to be useful for some purposes, they were of limited use for others. Only five per cent of them recorded the circumstances surrounding the cases. What they did show, however, was a striking seasonality to those suicide cases that reached the mortuaries. In 2001, 2002 and 2003 (but apparently not in 2000) around thirty-three per cent of cases occurred in January and February. The authors speculated that this might be explained by three factors. Firstly, this period follows the celebrations of Christmas and New Year when individuals commonly fall into debt; secondly, this is the time of year when parents are faced with paying annual school fees; and thirdly, this is also the time of seasonal food shortage. Strikingly, the authors fail to mention that though food shortages are indeed common in January and February, the years surveyed were far from 'normal' ones. They were in fact years of very serious and sustained food shortage in parts of Malawi, when seasonal shortfall turned into famine for some groups. Useful as this study is, it also has severe limitations, as the authors themselves acknowledge.

The research that I initiated into attitudes to suicide in Malawi was carried out by two university students (Ms Chikondi Lipato and Mr Pearson Mphangwe) both studying for psychology degrees. My own interviews were confined to a small group of magistrates and policemen.⁹⁸ The students were selected by Ms Mathero Nkhalamba, a lecturer in Psychology at Chancellor College, who oversaw their research. They were also briefed by me on two occasions on the purpose of the research and on questions of the sensitivity of the subject and research ethics. No research takes place in a vacuum and it is important to understand the context in which this small study took place. Malawi may be a small country, but it is overrun with social (and medical) researchers from overseas, many of them participating in very large and well-funded research teams. Much of this research now focuses on aspects of the country's HIV/AIDS epidemic, but there is a longer history of research into the endemic problem of poverty in Malawi. Death may not always be the explicit subject of this research, but it is never far beneath the surface. The demand for research on the part of non-governmental organizations, aid agencies and visiting academics like myself is such that social science students at the University, and their teachers, are frequently used as 'data collectors', a role that comes with some financial benefits, but also generates a degree of understandable resentment. It also has consequences for how both the student-researchers and the subjects of social research view the whole activity. 'Research' is something demanded by external actors, and is tied to the country's dependence on aid of one sort or another. 'Research' is generally conceptualized as oriented toward solving a 'development'-related problem and which must be carried out following a 'scientific' methodology. Given this context it is perhaps not surprising that one of the striking aspects of the interviews conducted by the students was the framing of suicide within a discourse of 'development' which

also sometimes included ideas around a 'progressive' and broadly psychological (as opposed to 'superstitious') approach to the problem.

Ms Lipato and Mr Mphangwe carried out the research in their home areas (Lilongwe and Kasungu districts respectively) and produced in total twenty-two neatly recorded and transcribed open-ended interviews. They had been supplied with a list of questions in advance, but were encouraged not to be completely constrained by these. The questions included enquiries into the linguistic representations of 'suicide', word associations, common suicide methods, perceptions of the incidence of and 'causes' of suicide, perceptions of age and gender distribution of suicide, religious attitudes toward suicide, burial practices, and perceptions of the role of the police, post-mortems and inquests. They were also encouraged to gather case studies of suicides known to individual respondents. Ms Lipato and Mr Mphangwe were scrupulous in documenting the context of the interviews and both produced interesting personal reflections on the research process. Their psychology training undoubtedly influenced their approach to the subject. They reflected at some length on the fact that talking about suicide is not easy and that although most people approached agreed to be interviewed, the 'results' gave a somewhat false impression of the research, which had at times been difficult and trying.

Most people who agreed to a conversation about suicide held the view that suicide was on the increase in their communities and that this was a problem. Interpreting such a view is of course not straightforward: when a researcher opens a conversation about suicide respondents may well feel that they are expected to reflect such a concern. Most purported to see suicide as a 'problem' because it was 'bad for development' because it resulted in the reduction of adults (some of whom were educated and had wealth-producing

potential) and left yet more children parentless. Though HIV/AIDS was not always directly alluded to in these responses, there is a clear resonance here with discourses on the 'wastage' of young adult lives as a result of the disease and the consequent problems of caring for children. Some perceived that suicide was on the increase and that this was an indication of larger social problems. Older informants in particular felt that younger people were committing suicide at a higher rate than in the past and expressed the view that they were (in the words of one woman) 'failing to withstand life's problems'. Some went on to remark that younger people had lost their (necessary) fear of death. Many people felt that one of the causes of the perceived increase in suicide was the wide availability of pesticides, which made suicide 'easier'. All but three respondents were members of Christian churches and reflected that suicide was against the teaching of the Bible. Most also reported that suicides were not given Christian burials, but there were some exceptions to this. Both Muslim respondents articulated strongly the view that suicide was a form of martyrdom – a perception that apparently bore little relation to their experience of suicides in their own communities. Older informants recalled that in the past the bodies of suicides had been greatly feared and had been subject to special rites designed to prevent their malevolent spirits from returning. Almost all respondents, young and old, when asked to make word associations with suicide, came up with 'witchcraft' and 'magic', but most argued that nowadays people were less inclined to blame surviving family members of causing the suicides of their relatives by means of witchcraft. Most said that they welcomed the intervention of the police and the performance of post-mortems, since the latter established the 'true' cause of death and therefore put an end to speculation and accusations of witchcraft.⁹⁹ A 'developmental' narrative was evident in two ways. Suicide was 'bad for development',

but with 'development' communities dealt with suicide in better, more rational ways. Many people interviewed expressed (alongside the fear and horror that suicidal acts almost always evince) a strong sense of compassion and understanding of individual predicaments. Many Malawians are familiar with a broadly conceived practice of psychological 'counselling' which is widespread in the country as a result of interventions connected with the HIV/AIDS epidemic and with various human rights campaigns. In relation to the suicides of HIV/AIDS patients, but also in some other cases, informants stressed the need for counselling and compassion to prevent suicides.

Though a very generalized discourse on the need for understanding and compassion was evident in the interviews, it was also clear that Malawian informants recognized different types of suicides in their communities, eliciting different responses. Pearson Mphangwe listed a set of case studies that he had collected in the course of his research and that seemed to him to represent distinct types of suicide.

Mrs D told the story of her grandparents. They had been married for many years but had a difficult relationship and argued frequently. One day Mrs D's grandfather came home in a bad mood and refused to eat the food that his wife had cooked. An argument ensued in the course of which Mrs D's grandfather struck his wife on the head with a pestle. She died shortly afterwards. Mrs D's grandfather took a rope and hanged himself in the kitchen of their house the same day. No one could understand what had made him so angry. The incident was reported to the chief and to the elders of the Roman Catholic Church who arranged a funeral.

Mr G knew a young man who had fallen in love with a girl and wanted to marry her. The girl's parents agreed to the marriage but his own parents refused and would not move

from their decision. The young man killed himself. The whole village blamed the parents, who felt deeply sad and ashamed. The young man had been a member of the CCAP (Presbyterian church). Since the church regards suicide as a sin, there was no church funeral.

Mrs M said that people sometimes committed suicide as a result of the infidelity of their spouses. She gave the example of a man she had known who heard frequent rumours that his wife was committing adultery with her cousin. He grew 'tired of hearing this painful story' and killed himself by ingesting a pesticide. The woman was 'chased' from the village by the man's relatives.

Ms Y told the story of the loss of a school friend. The girl had become noticeably thin over a period of time. Without telling her family she took herself for an HIV test. The result was positive. She told her friend that she had seen the suffering of people with AIDS and she thought of killing herself. One day she did not return from school. Eventually her body was found in a well. She had left a short note in which she said that she was 'tired' of living with HIV/AIDS: 'let me go and rest'. Everyone in the village was shocked and deeply saddened.

Mr S once worked with a man who had what appeared to be the good fortune of having two of his children selected in the same year to go to secondary school. But instead of feeling happy he 'just stayed quiet as if he had not heard anything good'. Worried about how he was going to pay for his children's fees and uniforms he attempted to secure a loan from his employer, but was refused. The next day he was found hanged from a tree. People were surprised and confused, but then a note was found in which the man

explained his despair at not being able to afford the secondary school fees.

Mr C knew a family in which there were two teenage boys and a girl. The girl had been brewing beer to earn money. The younger of her two brothers was unhappy about this, quarrelled with her about it and beat her up. On seeing this the older brother attacked him, hitting him so hard that he eventually killed him. Realizing what he had done he felt 'guilty' and feared arrest. He ran into the bush and hanged himself. The family was distraught. They had lost two boys at once.

In my analysis of inquest cases from the 1940s and 1950s, many of the same 'genres' of suicide story appeared. Men often killed themselves after they felt dishonoured in some way, or ashamed at having injured or killed a close relative. Some people apparently killed themselves out of despair at their extreme poverty or their incapacitation from long-term illness or disability. Marital disagreements featured prominently, and thwarted love drove some young people to suicide. The pressures of the cash economy and indebtedness drove some men to kill themselves. These pressures, now greatly increased and more generalized, featured prominently in the conversations that Mr Mphangwe and Ms Lipato held with their informants. They felt that younger people in particular were influenced by new media to aspire to a lifestyle and to possessions that they could not afford.

In her reflections on the research, Chikondi Lipato commented that, 'Most Malawians associate suicide with witchcraft. They believe that no person in his or her sanity would commit suicide unless under a magical spell.' But she went on to add that, 'In our communities suicide is considered either as shameful or unfortunate depending on the reasons why it was committed.'

Faced with real individual cases, rather than anonymized statistics, most of us falter in our understanding of suicide. Of course we can talk about unbearable loss, shame and dishonour, fear and a terrible sense of failure. If we are schooled in a medicalized discourse we might refer to mental illness and engage in a psychological post-mortem. While the Malawian informants might be less inclined than myself to resort to medicalized explanations and more inclined to refer to supernatural forces, these differences are one of degree. Beyond the very human desire to understand what motivates an individual to end their own life there often lingers an awed sense of the enormity of the act, and a feeling that the person was 'moved' by something beyond their control.

Conclusion

In their thorough and insightful testing of sociological theories of suicide from Durkheim onwards, Christian Baudelot and Roger Establet are able to say little about the African continent, owing to the lack of reliable statistics.¹⁰⁰ But some of their observations are nevertheless suggestive. Firstly, they note that Durkheim's prediction that the nineteenth-century rise in suicide rates in industrial economies would continue into the twentieth century proved wrong. Rapid industrialization and wealth creation do appear to be associated with an initial increase in suicide (as current studies of India confirm), but this increase can be reversed. Poverty, they argue, does not 'protect' against suicide, as Durkheim had suggested. They conclude that 'certain developments associated with the growth of wealth encourage suicide, whilst others discourage it'.¹⁰¹ Divorce is associated with a rise in suicide, as is a fall in fertility and an aging population, but these factors can be countered by other 'protective' effects of increasing wealth,

and though what they call 'primary individualism' is associated with a rise in suicide, new forms of sociability, self-realization and 'creative individualism' can cancel out these effects, giving people new reasons for wanting to go on living. But access to these more positive aspects of modern society are, as they note, extremely unevenly distributed, and young unemployed people are particularly vulnerable. Suicide, they conclude, is a legitimate object of sociological study, but they also concede that 'the courses which, in any given society, lead an individual to commit suicide elude sociology because suicide remains an individual and exceptional act in all milieus and social conditions'.¹⁰² One might add to this that the changing meanings attached to this 'exceptional act' also have a place in the larger study of suicide. Those meanings, I would suggest, not only reflect a society's views on the value of life, but may also themselves influence changing patterns of suicide. In this chapter I have tried to indicate some of the ways in which the recent 'discovery' of suicide has been invested with new meanings, and the extent to which it continues to reflect older ones.

ENDNOTES: CHAPTER VII

1. In his monumental study of suicide in Europe in the Middle Ages, Alexander Murray discusses African beliefs about suicide in a section on pollution: Murray, *Suicide in the Middle Ages*, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), II: *The Curse of Self-Murder*. African practices are also mentioned briefly by Michael MacDonald and Terence R. Murphy, *Sleepless Souls: Suicide in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 44–46. There is, however, a growing literature on suicide and slavery in the Atlantic world: Louis A. Perez, *To Die in Cuba: Suicide and Society* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); William D. Piersen, 'White Cannibals, Black Martyrs: Fear, Depression and Religious Faith as Causes of Suicide Among New Slaves', *Journal of Negro History*, 62 (1977), 147–59.
2. Georges Minois, *History of Suicide: Voluntary Death in Western Culture*, trans. by Lydia G. Cochrane (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); MacDonald and Murphy, *Sleepless Souls*. On the debate about industrialization and suicide rates in nineteenth-century England see Olive Anderson, 'Did Suicide Increase with Industrialization in Victorian England?', *Past and Present*, 86 (1980), 149–73; Howard I. Kushner, 'Suicide, Gender and the Fear of Modernity in Nineteenth-Century Medical and Social Thought', *Journal of Social History*, 26 (1993), 461–90.
3. Susan K. Morrissey, *Suicide and the Body Politic in Imperial Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2006), Introduction; *From Sin to Insanity: Suicide in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Jeffrey R. Watt (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University

- Press, 2004); Lisa Lieberman, *Leaving You: The Cultural Meaning of Suicide* (Chicago, IL: Ivan R. Dee, 2003); Thomas Szasz, *Fatal Freedom: The Ethics and Politics of Suicide* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1991); Al Alvarez, *The Savage God: A Study of Suicide* (London: Bloomsbury, 1971); George Howe Colt, *November of the Soul: The Enigma of Suicide* (New York, NY: Scribner, 1991).
4. Emile Durkheim, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*, trans. by John A. Spaulding and George Simpson (London: The Free Press, 1970); Unni Bille-Brahe, 'Sociology and Suicidal Behaviour', in *The International Handbook of Suicide and Attempted Suicide*, ed. by Keith Hawton and Kees van Heeringen (Chichester: Wiley, 2002), pp. 193–207.
 5. *Essential Papers on Suicide*, ed. by John T. Maltsberger and Mark J. Goldblatt (New York, NY: NYU Press, 1996).
 6. Such questions are raised in relation to the honour suicide of the Japanese tradition, but have a wider application. To what extent should politically motivated acts of reckless heroism be defined as suicide, and when should suicide be seen as an act of resistance or an act of submission? The cross-cultural literature is vast. An early and insightful review of the cross-cultural study of suicide and the theoretical issues implied is Arthur E. Hippler, 'Fusion and Frustration: Dimensions in the Cross-Cultural Ethnopsychology of Suicide', *American Anthropologist*, 71 (1969), 1074–87. A fascinating study of suicide and nationalist sentiment is Perez, *To Die in Cuba*. On 'revolutionary suicide' in Russia see Morrissey, *Suicide and the Body Politic in Imperial Russia*; on 'suicide as resistance' in China see Sing Lee and Arthur Kleinman, 'Suicide as Resistance in Chinese Society', in *Chinese Society: Change, Conflict and Resistance*, ed. by Elizabeth J. Perry and Mark Seldon (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 221–40. On the relationship between suicide and sacrifice in the Western tradition see Minois, *History of Suicide*.

7. Megan Vaughan, *Curing Their Ills: Colonial Power and African Illness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 100–28; Sloan Mahone, ‘East African Psychiatry and the Practical Problems of Empire’, in *Psychiatry and Empire*, ed. by Sloan Mahone and Megan Vaughan (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), pp. 41–67; Jock McCulloch, *Colonial Psychiatry and the ‘African Mind’* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
8. The first systematic study that questioned the view that depressive illness was rare in Africa was Margaret Field’s important book *Search for Security: An Ethno-Psychiatric Study of Rural Ghana* (London: Norton Library, 1960). Field studied a cocoa-producing area of Ghana where a large number of new healing shrines had been established. The women who visited these shrines typically confessed to misdeeds, often involving witchcraft. Field argued that these women were, in fact, psychologically ‘depressed’. Not everyone agreed with her analysis, but the work was important in inviting a different interpretation of witchcraft.
9. Raymond Prince, ‘The Changing Picture of Depressive Syndromes in Africa: Is It Fact or Diagnostic Fashion?’, *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 1 (1967), 177–92 (p. 190).
10. Vikram Patel, Jane Mutambwira and Sekai Nhiwatiwa, ‘Stressed, Depressed or Bewitched? A Perspective on Mental Health, Culture and Religion’, *Development in Practice*, 5 (1995), 216–24.
11. Gordon Parker, ‘Head to Head: Is Depression Over-Diagnosed?’, *British Medical Journal*, 335, 7615 (2007), 328; David Healy, *The Anti-Depressant Era* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).
12. Henri Collomb and René Collignon, ‘Les conduites suicidaires en Afrique’, *Psychopathologie Africaine*, 10 (1974), 55–113.
13. On the importance of ideas of honour in African history see John Iliffe, *Honour in African History* (Cambridge: Cambridge

- University Press, 2005), which contains numerous references to suicide and codes of honour. On politically motivated suicide see also Olufunke Adeboye, “‘Iku Ya’J’esin”: Politically Motivated Suicide, Social Honour and Chieftaincy Politics in Early Colonial Ibadan’, *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 14 (2007), 189–225. Questions of shame, honour and fate also feature prominently in interpretations of suicide in Chinua Achebe’s novel *Things Fall Apart* (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 1959): Alan R. Friesen, ‘Okonkwo’s Suicide as an Affirmative Act: Do Things Really Fall Apart?’, *Postcolonial Text*, 2 (2006) <<http://postcolonial.org/index.php/pct/article/view/453/354>> [accessed 2 October 2013], as well as in Wole Soyinka’s play *Death and the King’s Horseman* (1975).
14. M. D. W. Jeffreys, ‘Samsonic Suicide or Suicide of Revenge among Africans’, *African Studies*, 11 (1952), 118–22. ‘Magical thinking’ in relation to suicide is hardly unique to African societies, however. Many psychoanalytic accounts of suicide draw attention to its fantastical elements: Emile A. Gutheil, ‘Dream and Suicide’, and Viggo W. Jensen and Thomas A. Petty, ‘The Fantasy of Being Rescued in Suicide’, in *Essential Papers on Suicide*, ed. by Maltsberger and Goldblatt (New York, NY: New York University Press), pp. 118–30 and pp. 131–41.
 15. *African Homicide and Suicide*, ed. by Paul Bohannan (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1960).
 16. Andrew F. Henry, Jr, and James F. Short, *Suicide and Homicide: Some Economic, Sociological and Psychological Aspects of Aggression* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1954).
 17. Some of these rites bear an uncanny resemblance to those described for pre-Christian Europe, including burial at a crossroads.
 18. Jean S. La Fontaine, ‘Person and Individual: Some Anthropological Reflections’, in *The Category of the Person: Anthropology, Philosophy, History*, ed. by Michael Carrithers, Steven Collins and Steven Lukes (Cambridge: Cambridge

- University Press, 1985), pp. 123–41; *Personhood and Agency: The Experience of Self and Other in African Cultures*, ed. by Michael Jackson and Ivan Karp (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Press, 1990); Paul Riesman, 'The Person and the Life-Cycle in African Social Life and Thought', *African Studies Review*, 29 (1986), 71–138.
19. Perez, *To Die in Cuba*; Morrissey, *Suicide and the Body Politic in Imperial Russia*; Minois, *History of Suicide*.
 20. This is an issue raised in the much larger literature on the history of colonial legal systems, and in theoretical debates on the nature of the colonial archive and of colonialism itself. Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).
 21. Thomas Dixon, *From Passions to Emotions: The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
 22. Durkheim, *Suicide*; J. Maxwell Atkinson, *Discovering Suicide: Studies in the Social Organization of Sudden Death* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1978); Morrissey, *Suicide and the Body Politic in Imperial Russia*, Chapter 7; MacDonald and Murphy, *Sleepless Souls*. Alexander Murray also discusses at length the nature of mediaeval documentation on suicide: Murray, *Suicide in the Middle Ages*, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), I: *The Violent Against Themselves*.
 23. On the late colonial state and its 'development' objectives see Frederick Cooper, *Africa Since 1940: The Past of the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
 24. 'Ordinance No. 9 of 1948: Ordinance Relating to Inquests', in *The Laws of Nyasaland*, ed. by Sir Donald Kingdon, revised edition, 6 vols (London: Waterlow, 1957), I, p. 326.
 25. A 'native authority' was a chief who had been accorded official recognition by the colonial state. Under the 'Indirect Rule' system in place in Nyasaland and in other British

colonies in Africa, native authorities were given a range of new powers, including tax collection and adjudication of cases through a codified customary legal system. Inquests, however, were a matter for the coroner's court, presided over by a colonial officer. On colonial law in Nyasaland see Martin Chanock, *Law, Custom, and Social Order: The Colonial Experience in Malawi and Zambia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

26. I have changed names to preserve privacy. National Archives of Malawi [hereafter NAM], J5/11/8/2: Inquests, Fort Johnston District, 1952. I have also used the contemporaneous place names and colonial spellings throughout.
27. For an incisive discussion of the inquest in English history see Ian A. Burney, *Bodies of Evidence: Medicine and the Politics of the English Inquest, 1830–1926* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).
28. J. W. M. van Breugel, *Chewa Traditional Religion* (Blantyre: CLAIM, 2001), Chapter 4; Samuel Chingondole, 'The First and Second Funeral Rites in a Mang'anja Traditional Society' (unpublished diploma in Theology, St Peter's Major Seminary, University of Malawi, 1993); A. Z. Manda, 'The Death Ritual among the Tonga of Nkhata Bay District' Kalusa, Walima T., 'Aspects of African Health in the Mining Industry on the Copperbelt: A Case Study of Roan Antelope Mine, 1920–1964', (unpublished masters thesis, University of Zambia, 1994) research paper, Theology and Religious Studies Department, University of Malawi, 1988).
29. Luise White, *Speaking with Vampires: Rumor and History in Colonial Africa* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000).
30. MacDonald and Murphy, *Sleepless Souls*; Michael MacDonald, 'The Secularization of Suicide in England, 1660–1800', *Past and Present*, 111 (1986), 50–100.
31. By the late 1940s, a nationalist movement was well under way in Nyasaland, and in the 1950s there was an escalation of protest focused on the Central African Federation. Some

of the inquests on suicides in the 1950s sit in the archive alongside inquests on individuals who were killed while protesting.

32. This is the view put forward by many of those interviewed in Malawi in January 2008. It cannot, of course, be held to be representative of the colonial system.
33. Colonial officers in Nyasaland were required to pass language examinations, but the depth of their linguistic knowledge varied. Administrators were frequently moved from place to place, and since many different languages were spoken in Nyasaland, this meant that linguistic competence in one area did not always transfer to another. Translators are rarely mentioned in colonial documentation, but they were usually clerks employed by the administration. They played a critical role in the courtroom and in other areas of the colonial machinery.
34. In the history of suicide in Europe, the issue of sequestration of the property of a suicide, and the financial consequences for their families, looms large: Murray, *The Curse of Self-Murder*; Minois, *History of Suicide*; MacDonald and Murphy, *Sleepless Souls*.
35. *Mtima* means 'heart' (located in the chest) in chiYao, but also the centre or core of anything. The word is appended to verbs to describe emotional and moral qualities, for example to describe someone who is brave (*-nonopa mtima*) or good-tempered (*-simana mtima*). A number of phrases including the word *mtima* describe a disturbed state of mind: *mtima uli myasi-myasipe* (to be disturbed at heart), *-nyelenyenduka mtima* (to be sore at heart, to grieve). G. M. Sanderson, *A Dictionary of the Yao Language* (Zomba: Government Printers, 1954). We can presume that one of these phrases was used by the witnesses to this case.
36. NAM, J5/11/17/1, Inquests, Mzimba District, No. 2 of 1951.
37. NAM, Inquests, Mlanje District (uncatalogued), No. 14 of 1966, 15-11-6F, Box 12327.
38. Megan Vaughan, *The Story of an African Famine: Gender and Famine in Twentieth Century Malawi* (Cambridge: Cambridge

University Press, 1987).

39. NAM, J5/11/7/1, Inquests, Kasungu District, No. 6 of 1955.
40. NAM, J5/11/15/2, Inquests, Mlanje District, No. 12 of 1952.
41. Stacey Hynd studied the same archive that I used for her examination of homicide cases. She found that most men who killed or injured their wives did not commit suicide. Hynd, 'Fatal Families: Narratives of Spousal Killing and Domestic Violence in Murder Trials in Kenya and Nyasaland, c. 1920–1957', in *Domestic Violence and the Law in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa*, ed. by Emily S. Burrill, Richard L. Roberts and Elizabeth Thornberry (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2010).
42. There were many such cases, but one in Mulanje district (formerly Mlanje) provoked the coroner to comment about the husband that, 'He must have been in an evil temper because even when the food was ready he refused it more than once and then ejected his wife ... It therefore appears that in a fit of anger, or perhaps more from sheer perversity, he hanged himself.' NAM, J5/11/5/2, Inquests, Mlanje District, No. 7 of 1952.
43. NAM, J5/11/15/3, Inquests, Mlanje District, No. 11 of 1954.
44. NAM, J5/11/15/3, Inquests, Mlanje District, No. 5 of 1957.
45. NAM, J5/11/4/1, Inquests, Cholo District, No. 2 of 1951.
46. NAM, J5/11/15/2, Inquests, Mlanje District, No. 5 of 1953.
47. NAM, J5/11/15/2, Inquests, Mlanje District, No. 12 of 1952.
48. NAM, J5/11/1/7, Inquests, Blantyre District, No. 12 of 1956. This and other cases like it are not easy to analyse, but remind us of Field's argument concerning women, witchcraft and guilt in the Gold Coast: Field, *Search for Security*.
49. NAM, J5/11/3/1, Inquests, Chiradzulu District, No. 1 of 1955.
50. NAM, J5/11/1/4, Inquests, Blantyre District, No. 10 of 1952.
51. NAM, J5/11/8/2, Inquests, Fort Johnston District, No. 3 of 1952.
52. This is similar to the picture presented by T. Asuni for suicide in Nigeria: Asuni, 'Suicide in Western Nigeria', *British Medical Journal*, 2, 5312 (1962), 1091–97.

53. The late 1940s and 1950s were a period of economic growth in Nyasaland and of significant (though still relatively small) investments in education and other forms of 'development'. On differentiation in the Southern Province in this period see Vaughan, *Story of an African Famine*.
54. Ibid.
55. NAM, J5/11/15/1, Inquests, Mlanje District, No. 7 of 1951.
56. As Murray writes in his account of suicide in mediaeval Europe, 'Among the very poor it remains for the most part a matter of guesswork whether destitution, on its own, ever sufficed as a motive for suicide.' Murray, *The Curse of Self-Murder*, p. 159.
57. The burden of care for the long-term sick and disabled in contemporary Botswana is described by Julie Livingston, *Debility and the Moral Imagination in Botswana* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006).
58. Other illnesses frequently mentioned are yaws, tuberculosis, epilepsy, rheumatism, bilharzia and 'blindness'. Clearly these 'diagnoses' should be treated with caution. More often witnesses merely refer to pain – especially pain in the legs and stomach and 'headaches'. One case refers to 'toothache'.
59. NAM, Inquests, Dowa District (uncatalogued), No. 32 of 1967, 1-17-11F, Box 17382.
60. NAM, J5/11/15/3, Inquests, Mlanje District, No. 4 of 1954.
61. NAM, J5/11/17/1, Inquests, Mzimba District, inquest held on 17 October 1954 (number of inquest illegible).
62. 'Boma' was the word used to designate a colonial administrative centre, but it could also mean 'government'. NAM, J5/11/17/1, Inquests, Mzimba District, Inquest held on 29 June 1954.
63. NAM, J5/11/22/1, Inquests, Zomba District, No. 22 of 1948.
64. Notably absent from these cases, as recorded in the inquests, is any speculation by either Christians or Muslims about the fate of the souls of suicides. There is also no indication that Christians here believed suicide to be the work of Satan.
65. MacDonald and Murphy, *Sleepless Souls*, Chapter 9; Morrissey,

Suicide and the Body Politic in Imperial Russia, Chapter 6; Minois, *History of Suicide*, p. 287.

66. NAM, J5/11/19/1, Inquests, Nkhata Bay District, No. 2 of 1953.
67. NAM, J5/11/4/1, Inquests, Cholo District, No. 1 of 1949.
68. Collomb and Collignon, 'Les conduites suicidaires en Afrique'.
69. Although Ian Burney's *Bodies of Evidence* deals with a very different context, I have found its discussion of the history of inquests in nineteenth-century England to be very useful.
70. T. Malanda, 'How to Commit Suicide in Kenya', *The Standard*, 19 April 2010 <http://www.standardmedia.co.ke/?articleID=2000007989&story_title=How-to-commit-suicide-in-Kenya-> [accessed 1 June 2013].
71. I have not conducted a systematic survey of press coverage of suicide, so this observation needs to be treated with caution. But cases of suicide are regularly covered in the newspapers in Central and Eastern Africa, along with discussions of its causes and consequences.
72. Julie Livingston, 'Suicide, Risk, and Investment in the Heart of the African Miracle', *Cultural Anthropology*, 24, 4 (2009), 652–80.
73. Livingston quotes these figures (a male suicide rate of 23 per 100,000 in 2000), which are said to be drawn from a report produced by the University of Botswana. She also provides anecdotal evidence for this increase. However, she does acknowledge that she has been unable to identify the original report from which these figures are drawn, and my efforts to do so have also not been successful.
74. D. Exner and W. E. Thurston, 'Understanding "Passion Killings" in Botswana: An Investigation of Media Framing', *Journal of Women's Studies*, 10 (2009), 1–16; M. J. Odireleng, '“Passion-Killings”: A Media and Cultural Perspective of Intimate Femicide in Botswana' (unpublished doctoral thesis, College of Social Work, University of Utah, 2009); Livingston, 'Suicide, Risk, and Investment'.
75. Livingston, 'Suicide, Risk and Investment'.
76. *New Vision*, 31 August 2007. For global suicide rates see <<http://>

www.who.int/mental-health/prevention/suicideprevent/en/>. The only mainland sub-Saharan African country for which WHO publishes statistics is Zimbabwe, quoting a (1990) rate of 10.6 per 100,000 for males and 5.2 for females. For a review of the (very limited) data on current suicide rates on the African continent see Lourens Schlebusch, *Suicidal Behaviour in South Africa* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2005).

77. *New Vision*, 31 August 2007.
78. J. Lukwago, 'Lwango Warns on Suicide', *New Vision*, 29 October 2007.
79. M. Mangani, 'Rise in Suicide Cases – A Source of Worry', *Times of Zambia*, 26 April 2011.
80. Quoted in Maganyi, 'Rise in Suicide Cases'.
81. 'Teen' suicide, or more accurately the suicides of young people under the age of twenty-five years, appears to be a concern across the region, but is particularly remarked on in South Africa where, by some accounts, it is the second most common cause of death for 15- to 24-year-olds: A. Smit, 'Suicide Amongst Young People in South Africa', *NGO Pulse* <<http://www.ngopulse.org/article/suicide-amongst-young-people-south-africa>> [accessed 1 October 2013].
82. E. Muwamba, 'Tragedy in Ndirande: 3 Perish in Raging Fire', *The Nation* (Malawi), 2 September 2010; J. Jimu, 'Retracing the Ndirande Tragedy', *The Nation* (Malawi), 4 April 2011.
83. D. M. Ndeti, M. Pizzo, L. I. Khasakhala, V. N. Mutiso, F. A. Ongecha and D. Kokonya, 'A Cross-Sectional Study of Co-Occurring Suicidal and Psychotic Symptoms in Inpatients at Mathari Psychiatric Hospital, Nairobi, Kenya', *Primary Care Companion: Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, 11 (2009), 110–14; D. M. Ndeti, L. I. Khasakhala, V. N. Mutiso and A. W. Mbwaiyo, 'Suicidality and Depression Among Adults Admitted in General Medical Facilities in Kenya', *Annals of General Psychiatry*, 9, 7 (2010) <<http://www.annals-general-psychiatry.com/content/9/1/7>> [accessed 1 October 2010].

84. J. Kiare, 'Experts Raise Alarm Over Rising Cases of Suicide', *The Standard* (Nairobi), 27 July 2011.
85. E. Kinyanda, D. Wamala, S. Musisi and H. Hjelmeland, 'Suicide in Urban Kampala: A Preliminary Exploration', *African Health Sciences*, 11 (2011), 219–27; E. Kinyanda, R. Kizzo, J. Levin, S. Ndyabangi and C. Abbo, 'Adolescent Suicidality as Seen in Northeastern Uganda', *Crisis*, 32 (2011), 43–51.
86. S. Burrows, 'Suicide Mortality in the South African Context: Exploring the Role of Social Status and Environmental Circumstances' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Karolinska Institute, Sweden, 2005); Schlegel, *Suicidal Behaviour*; F. Meer, *Race and Suicide in South Africa* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976); J. Parle, *States of Mind: Searching for Mental Health in Natal and Zululand, 1868–1918* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2007); K. Ward, 'Defining and Defiling the Criminal Body at the Cape of Good Hope, c. 1652–1795', in *Discipline and the Other Body: Correction, Corporeality, Colonialism*, ed. by S. Pierce and A. Rao (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).
87. Overall, suicide rates for South Africa for the period 1979–1981 were estimated at 8.4 per 100,000 for men and 2.2 for women, rising to an estimated 24.6 for men and 6.9 for women in 2000. For an analysis of the South African statistics see Burrows, 'Suicide Mortality' and Schlegel, *Suicidal Behaviour*.
88. B. L. Meel, 'A Study of the Incidence of Suicide by Hanging in the Sub-Region of Transkei, South Africa', *Journal of Clinical and Forensic Medicine*, 10 (2003), 153–57.
89. H. Hendin, *Black Suicide* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1969); A. Fearnley, 'Race and the Intellectualizing of Suicide in the American Human Sciences, c. 1950–1975', in *Histories of Suicide: International Perspectives on Self-Destruction in the Modern World*, ed. by J. Weaver and D. Wright (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).
90. This mode of analysis is in part a very rational response to the very high rates of violent death of various kinds in South Africa, but it is also facilitated by the collection of national-

level statistics through the National Injury Mortality Surveillance System, which includes suicide deaths. On the uses of these data see S. Burrows, M. Vaez, A. Butchart and L. Laflamme, 'The Share of Suicide in Injury Deaths in the South African Context: A Sociodemographic Distribution', *Public Health*, 117 (2003), 3–10. These questions are not confined to the modern South African case. See, for example, Susan Morrissey's discussion of alcoholism and suicide in nineteenth-century Russia: S. Morrissey, 'Drinking to Death: Suicide, Vodka and Religious Burial in Russia', *Past and Present*, 186 (2005), 117–46.

91. Fearnley, 'Race and Intellectualizing'.
92. The Pietermaritzburg Suicidology Project, which produces much of the research on suicide in South Africa, was established by clinical psychologists in 1983.
93. C. Baudelot and R. Establet, *Suicide: The Hidden Side of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008); Bohannan, African Homicide and Suicide.
94. H. Hjelmeland, E. Kinyanda, B. L. Knizek, V. Owens, H. Nordvik and K. Svarva, 'A Discussion of the Value of Cross-Cultural Studies in the Search of Meaning(s) of Suicidal Behaviour and the Methodological Challenges of Such Studies', *Archives of Suicide Research*, 10 (2006), 15–27; H. Hjelmeland, B. L. Knizek, E. Kinyanda, S. Musisi, H. Mordvik and K. Svarva, 'Suicidal Behaviour as Communication in a Cultural Context: A Comparative Study Between Uganda and Norway', *Crisis*, 29 (2008), 137–44; Hjelmeland, C. S. Akotia, V. Owens, B. L. Knizek, R. Schroeder and E. Kinyanda, 'Self-Reported Suicidal Behaviour and Attitudes Towards Suicide and Suicide Prevention Among Psychology Students in Ghana, Uganda and Norway', *Crisis*, 29 (2008), 20–31; B. L. Knizek, E. Kinyanda, V. Owens and H. Hjelmeland, 'Ugandan Men's Perceptions of What Causes and What Prevents Suicide', *Journal of Men, Masculinities and Spirituality*, 5 (2011), 4–21; J. Mugisha, B. L. Knizek and H. Hjelmeland, 'Doing Qualitative Research on Suicide in a Developing Country', *Crisis*, 32 (2011), 15–23.

95. At the time when I carried out this research Dr Felix Kauye (the country's only resident consultant psychiatrist) was seeking funds for a nationwide survey of suicide. At the St John of God centre in Mzuzu (a pioneering teaching and community mental-health centre) clinical psychologists shared the view that suicide, particularly that related to serious psychiatric illness, was both increasing and under-reported.
96. C. P. Dzamalala, D. A. Milner and N. G. Liomba, 'Suicide in Blantyre, Malawi (2000–2003)', *Journal of Clinical Forensic Medicine*, 13 (2006), 65–69.
97. Pesticide poisoning appears to have taken over from hanging as the primary mode of suicide in Malawi. The increasing use of pesticides in suicide is a much wider phenomenon in Africa than in other parts of the world and has given rise to debates about access to these substances and regulation. It has recently been suggested that organophosphate insecticide exposure may itself contribute to depression and suicide, thus complicating the analysis of the relationship between suicide and pesticide availability: L. London, A. J. Wesseling, D. Mergler and H. Kromhout, 'Suicide and Exposure to Organophosphate Insecticides: Cause or Effect?', *American Journal of Industrial Medicine*, 47 (2005), 308–21.
98. I had intended to carry out the community survey myself but a family death necessitated my return to the UK.
99. Predictably, this view was also emphasized in my interviews with police officers and magistrates.
100. Baudelot and Establet, *Suicide*.
101. Baudelot and Establet, *Suicide*, p. 63.
102. Baudelot and Establet, *Suicide*, p. 183.

CHAPTER VIII

Maternal Mortality in Malawi: History and Moral Responsibility

Megan Vaughan

When Joyce Banda became President in April 2012, the people of Malawi had acquired a leader with a well-earned reputation for furthering the interests of women. Unlike some of the region's 'first ladies', whose philanthropic foundations, typically aimed at women and children, have been founded more in the interests of self-promotion than of their declared beneficiaries, Banda had a track record. Malawian public discourse in recent years has become saturated with the vocabulary of human rights, and the rights of women and children in particular, but the precise meaning of this language to those articulating it is not always very clear.¹ Joyce Banda, however, had already spoken publicly of the personal experiences that informed her advocacy on the part of women. She spoke of her abusive first marriage and she spoke of her experience of childbirth:

I have been through an abusive marriage and I am a victim myself of childbirth complications. In 1984, after having my fourth child, I suffered from post-partum haemorrhage. It occurred to me that the only reason I am alive is because of the status that I had and because my husband was a high court judge. He had a friend who knew a gynaecologist who rushed and saved my life.²

In 1997, using prize money from an African leadership award, Banda had established the Joyce Banda Foundation. She worked closely with the UNFPA and in 2009/2010 was appointed Goodwill Ambassador for Safe Motherhood by the African Union. She has often spoken of her horror at the fact that Malawi has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world: 'We were at 807 women dying per 100,000 births – the highest being Sierra Leone, which had been at war.' In government, and now as President, Banda has restated her commitment to addressing this issue.



Figure 1: President Joyce Banda of Malawi

President Banda was and is right to be worried about Malawi's maternal health statistics. Measuring maternal mortality is far from straightforward in countries without a comprehensive vital registration system and where a high proportion of births take place outside medical centres, but whichever way you look at it, Malawi's record, until very recently, has been a dismal one, as President Banda herself acknowledges.³ In particular, the estimates of maternal mortality ratios (the number of maternal deaths per 100,000 live births) in the 1990s and early 2000s were alarming, hovering around and above 1000, with 1140 being a widely quoted figure for the early 2000s.⁴ This latter figure placed Malawi very close to the bottom of global tables, at 179 out of 181 countries. Along with a number of other countries in Africa (notably Ethiopia and Rwanda), Malawi appears to have recently registered a marked improvement. A 2012 WHO report, which summarized estimates from WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA and the World Bank, put Malawi's 2010 maternal mortality ratio at 460, which, if correct, represents a percentage change of -4.4 in the period 1990–2010.⁵

Interpreting these figures is a complex task and no account is likely to be completely conclusive. The appalling figures for the 1990s and early 2000s have to be read in light of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, since we know that HIV/AIDS is one 'indirect' cause of maternal deaths.⁶ Following from this, and contributing to the recent improvement in the figures, is the greater availability of anti-retroviral treatments. But HIV/AIDS, though very significant, is not likely to be the whole story. In the 1990s and 2000s Malawi's already fragile public health system came under ever more strain as a consequence of economic crisis and poor management, and in the early 2000s the country suffered repeated food crises. Complicating the analysis of trends further is the fact that baseline data from the 1970s and 1980s is patchy and unreliable. Certainly the incomplete data hampers our

ability to say anything definitive about epidemiological trends. But on the other hand, as advocates in the field of maternal health frequently remind us, we know *enough* about the major causes of maternal mortality and *enough* about what policies and practices are effective in reducing it, not to be paralyzed by the imperfections of the data.⁷ Malawi still has a very serious problem with maternal health, but the recent improvements in its statistics are an indication of what can be achieved when political will gets applied to this issue. This is hardly surprising. We know, from an extensive historical and comparative literature, that maternal mortality ratios only come down through interventions, and behind these interventions there usually lies a concerted political campaign and moral crusade.⁸ I will return to Malawi's recent history of maternal health later in this chapter, but now I want to take a step back and look at a somewhat longer history of maternal mortality as a political and moral issue in this part of Africa.

Figure 2 is a drawing of a *wâkongwe* – a mud-built model of a woman used as a teaching tool in the boys' initiation ceremony of the Yao-speaking people of southern Malawi. An account of that ceremony, including this drawing, was published in 1924 by Hugh Stannus Stannus, a medical doctor and ethnographer who had spent several years practising in the country before the First World War.⁹ The *wâkongwe* is a representation of a pregnant woman who has died 'undelivered' (in Stannus's words) because her husband was unfaithful while she was pregnant. Unfortunately we have no photograph of this particular figure, though Stannus does supply photographs of some of the other models used in the ceremony. He tells us that this is a very large figure (much larger than life-size), and a very realistic one. We are asked to imagine a group of initiates, young boys of eleven or twelve years, being instructed to look hard at this figure moulded out of mud and reclining like a beached whale. 'The woman is evidently lying down,'

writes Stannus. 'One hand supports the head, the other grasps the thigh as if she were in pain; the breasts are made large and the figure being in relief, the prominent abdomen and expanded umbilicus are noticeable features'.

The *wâkongwe* spoke to the problem of maternal death, and to preoccupations with health, fertility and reproduction in this region that operated at the level of political systems as well as of the most intimate relations. And strikingly, the *wâkongwe* delivered its message directly to young boys, reminding them not only that their sexual behaviour and their moral conduct could determine the success or failure of marital fertility, but that their future wives might *die* in childbirth because of their misconduct. In the East Central African region (and beyond) infertility, miscarriages, stillbirths and maternal deaths were often attributed to the adulterous behaviour of one or other marital partner, more often the woman. In stressing male responsibility the Yao may have been unusual, though there are certainly other examples of the dangers of childbirth being hammered home in boys' initiation ceremonies, and of birthing being equated with warfare.¹⁰ 'Confessions' of adultery were (and are) extracted from women enduring painful and problematic labours, as Audrey Richards witnessed and documented in Northern Rhodesia in the 1930s (see Chapter II). The woman whose desperately sad funeral she attended had died following a stillbirth having not confessed to her (presumed) adulterous behaviour while pregnant. To an outsider like Richards, this verdict seemed almost unbearably harsh, but maternal deaths, perhaps even more than most deaths, required a moral account and accounting. Recent ethnographies have registered, with similar unease, the practice of 'confession' during difficult births.¹¹

The influence of moral conduct on the success or failure of reproduction did not simply rest on sexual behaviour or marital partners during and immediately after a pregnancy.

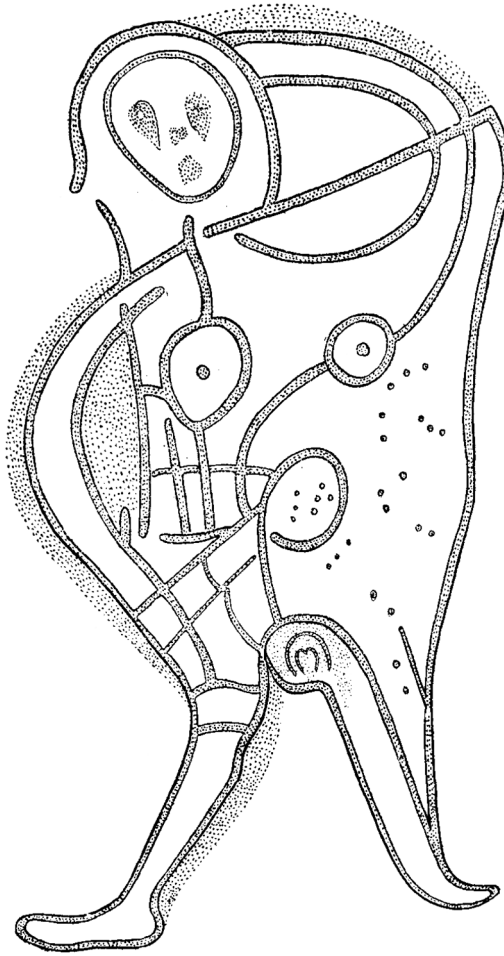


Figure 2: Drawing of a *wâkongwe*, a mud-built model of a woman used as a teaching tool in Yao boys' initiation ceremonies

As we have already seen, societies in this region made connections between biology and history, and these connections worked vertically across generations, linking the management of death directly with reproduction of the next generation, and they worked horizontally, linking the conduct of the sexually active with the health and welfare of the body politic.

In the case of the Bemba-speaking people in neighbouring Northern Rhodesia these connections were particularly explicit. Marital relations entailed not only the exchange of bodily substances between husbands and wives, but also the exchange of fractions of each partner's cross-generational spiritual entities – the *mipashi*.¹² Marital intercourse occasioned the partial absorption of another individual's ancestry. As we have seen in Chapters I and II, if one partner died, then that bit of their ancestry would have to be returned to its own kin group through an act of ritual intercourse, otherwise it would cause havoc to future reproduction. The correct management of death, then, was critical to reproductive success and the safe passage of women and their babies through the dangerous process of childbirth. Though responsibility for cases of maternal and infant deaths might be laid at the door of individual women and men, in many cases the post-mortem widened and deepened. Perhaps the problem had arisen in a prior generation; perhaps it arose through the behaviour of another member of the kin group. And if there was any hint that such deaths were becoming more common than usual, then the accusatory gaze would turn to the political authorities, whose job it was to ensure the well-being and fertility of the wider community. Maternal health was an intrinsically political issue. Colonial interventions into this field complicated these politics and reconfigured the ways in which moral responsibility was distributed.

If, as we saw in Chapter II, Audrey Richards kept her feelings to herself about the treatment of Bemba women dying in childbirth in the 1930s, this was not the case for the medical missionaries who, from the late nineteenth century, had begun providing rudimentary medical services throughout Africa. Maternal and child health was an early focus of their concern, particularly in the case of Protestant missions, and it was a concern adopted by the colonial state in the inter-war period,

itself under scrutiny from international agencies and lobbyists.¹³ Missionaries were often appalled by the treatment of women in childbirth and said so. For them this issue was one component of a larger body of beliefs and practices in African societies that oppressed and dehumanized certain sections of the community, including women. Their analysis, in this respect, is a direct antecedent of much contemporary humanitarian and feminist argument and activism that typically views reproductive health problems as symptomatic of wider and deeper societal issues – the subordinate status of women and the workings of patriarchy. As has been well documented, colonial missionaries adopted ‘women’s’ causes as integral to their wider project of bringing Christian ‘civilization’ and salvation to African societies. Addressing maternal and child health issues, then, was one route into a set of wider concerns with the centrally important institutions of marriage and kinship, as well as with the local spiritual beliefs that required eradication if Christianity was to advance.

This is not in any sense to cast doubt on the sincerity of medical missionaries as they worked to improve maternal health, nor to question the logic of doing so. Just as many present-day African medical professionals find unacceptable the high rates of maternal mortality in their countries and in the hospitals and clinics in which they work, so too did colonial medical missionaries. Furthermore, it was clear to any observer of African societies that questions of fertility and particularly of reproductive failure were matters of huge concern, so this was an area of shared interest, even if the prescribed solutions might not always be the same. It is also important to remember that maternal mortality was a pressing social and political issue in the European countries from which most missionaries came, and it was a problem for which, in the inter-war period, there appeared to be solutions on hand. As the work of Irvine Loudon and others has shown, some countries (notably the

Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands) had made improvements in maternal mortality in the early twentieth century through the use of trained midwives and particularly through the conscientious use of antiseptic techniques. Further dramatic and more widespread improvements came after 1937 with the introduction of sulfonamides, which were extremely effective against the *streptococcus* strains that were the main causes of puerperal fever, the most common cause of maternal deaths in Europe.¹⁴ Even before the advent of antibiotics, inter-war health activists in Europe could point to interventions in obstetric care that made significant inroads into maternal death rates *without* there being any overall improvement in underlying social and economic conditions.¹⁵ In other words, this was a medical problem for which there appeared to be some fairly straightforward solutions, the most obvious of which (drawing from the European experience) was the training of midwives and the application of antiseptic techniques. Though drawing lessons from this history, as from others, is bound to be hazardous, there is still some consensus around these issues. In their review of the evidence, Van Lerberghe and De Brouwere conclude that the delivery of 'professionalized' obstetric care (particularly through trained midwives) is what produces significant reductions in maternal mortality, across countries with contrasting levels of wealth, though they also argue that this is only achievable when the preconditions of political responsibility and professional accountability have been met.¹⁶

So medical missionaries had good reasons to be obsessed with soap, and good reasons to want to impart their knowledge on obstetric techniques to African women, assuming as they did that African knowledge was defective on this subject. But, as Nancy Hunt has shown in her compelling account of missionary midwifery in the Belgian Congo, they did not stop there.¹⁷ As in African societies, so for Christian missionaries

the matters of fertility and reproduction were themselves exceptionally fertile grounds for spiritual and social commentary and for the imparting of moral lessons. In some cases this involved the very conscious deployment of languages of salvation and civilization, light and dark, in relation to midwifery and childbirth; in other cases meanings over which no one had direct control accrued around the new techniques and technologies of childbirth that they were promoting. The result was a highly charged and morally saturated field of medicine in which blame (never absent from the area of childbirth, as we have seen) circulated readily. The missionaries were surely correct to interpret African midwifery practices as more than a set of techniques but as the locus of important spiritual beliefs and social norms. Their genuine outrage at the loss of women's lives in childbirth was thus frequently combined with a deep horror of what went on in the darkness of the birthing process. The older women typically in charge of assisting at births, sometimes (but not always) acknowledged as local experts in childbirth, were over and again depicted as witches, presiding over abhorrent and immoral practice, as well as being painted as dirty and inept. In contrast the new maternity wards of missionary hospitals were shining beacons of cleanliness, civilization and productive womanhood, presided over by women missionaries and their new African recruits. These latter were young, educated Christian women who could be separated from the context of the traditional village and encouraged to invest in a new form of African womanhood and motherhood. Maternal health, then, was quite explicitly set up as a battleground between tradition and a Christian modernity, and between death and life.

Those polarized images have shown a remarkable longevity, and continue to inform the politics of maternal health. Like many other gendered practices in the colonial period, midwifery was a site, not only of racialized thinking, but also

of emergent class identities. By the late 1940s educated men in southern Malawi were agitating for greater access to clinic-based midwifery care for their wives less on medical grounds than on those of 'respectability'. In neighbouring Tanganyika increased demand for maternity services in the post-war period led to overcrowding of facilities and to the Colonial Medical Department desperately back-peddalling on its midwifery policy.¹⁸ It was no accident, of course, that clinic-based births had become a marker of respectability – this is exactly how they had been promoted by missionaries and colonial medical departments – and there is no doubt that many women greatly valued the opportunity to give birth outside the village and away from the confessional context of local midwifery. However, the consequences of this association, and of the discursive polarization of 'traditional' and 'modern' midwifery, continue to haunt maternal health policies to this day, as we shall see.

Whilst colonial discourses on midwifery tended to be 'black' and 'white', birthing *practices* were changing in more complex ways in the course of the twentieth century. The opposition set up between local midwives and their modern biomedical counterparts obscures what was often, in a rural context in particular, a more productive and complex relationship between different practitioners of midwifery, and the invention of the category of 'traditional midwife' or 'birth attendant'. It also completely ignores the fact that (in the case of Malawi at least) until very recently, most births were not assisted by an 'expert' of any description, but by a close relative whose knowledge was informally acquired and passed on.¹⁹ As much literature on the history of medicine in Africa has shown, the labels 'traditional' and 'modern' are themselves inventions that tend to obscure the plurality of medical systems and practices that have not only coexisted, but have also interacted with each other. These include African practices ranging from

herbal medicine to spirit possession movements, and (in some regions) a body of imported ideas and techniques from Islamic sources, as well as biomedicine, itself often experienced in differentiated forms.²⁰ The African 'traditional' healer wielding a syringe and prescribing antibiotics is a familiar figure in contemporary Africa. It is often argued that African patients and their caregivers prefer to operate in a context of medical pluralism, picking and choosing amongst remedies depending on the ailment and the assumed cause. But it is also the case that where access to biomedical services is rationed and unreliable, people have little choice but to be flexible in their approach to healing, even if they would prefer to use these services. The 'market' for healing services has always been a vibrant one, since no particular system has a monopoly on knowledge and practice, and healers of all types have been active within this market. Amongst those healers are men and women trained within the biomedical system and, in this region, for most of the colonial period the majority of these would have been mission trained, and would have included midwives. Local midwifery practices, then, were highly unlikely to have been static in the twentieth century, with mission-trained midwives returning to their villages and passing on their techniques to others.²¹ No doubt some of them met with resistance, but there is compelling evidence from the medical anthropological literature of a culture of pragmatism – if a medicine or technique was effective, it was likely to be adopted. This was happening long before the WHO-inspired initiatives of the 1970s aimed at training so-called Traditional Birth Attendants.

We have direct evidence of this syncretic process happening in Malawi from the work of Colin Bullough, an obstetrician who pioneered the training of Traditional Birth Attendants in the late 1970s. Influenced by his own clinical experience and by recent developments in WHO and other global organizations,

Bullough carried out a survey on childbirth in the Central Region of Malawi, as a prelude to introducing his training scheme. He found that the vast majority of non-hospital births were attended by female relatives of the mother, usually her own mother. Traditional midwives, acknowledged experts who usually charged something for their services, only assisted at around fifteen per cent of births. In the Central Region of Malawi where Bullough conducted most of his research they were commonly known as *adoctola* ('doctor'), and more rarely as *azamba* (sing: *mzamba*).²² What he discovered about the practices of these midwives was also interesting. Whilst in most 'village births' women were encouraged to deliver in a seated or squatting position, *adoctola* favoured the dorsal position, and also tended to cut the umbilical cord before the baby was delivered. Furthermore, as attested to by the photographs included in his thesis, Bullough found that the birthing huts used by these midwives often contained not only plastic-covered mattresses but other equipment including forceps, tubing, enema cans, scissors and cord ligatures. None of the midwives interviewed in Bullough's study was medically trained or had any but very basic education. However, and significantly, a few of them had worked in hospitals as orderlies. Bullough concluded that, 'It would seem that they have voluntarily copied hospital practice in these respects.'²³ Though Bullough was in some senses himself the creator of the category of 'Traditional Birth Attendant' in Malawi, it is clear from his study that Malawian women had themselves been for some time forging a set of practices that incorporated elements of hospital-based midwifery.

If 'traditional' midwives were innovators, it is also clear from Bullough's account that the acquisition of equipment and adoption of the dorsal position for childbirth did not necessarily imply a change in understanding of the causes of childbirth complications. Though they were aware of the dangers of

cephalo-pelvic disproportion (one contributor to the very high incidence of obstructed labour in his samples), and were quick to recognize the danger posed by anaemia, they did 'not understand the anatomy and physiology of labour nor the function of the placenta'. Furthermore, their diagnosis of labour difficulties revolved around the dominant belief in the role of marital unfaithfulness. Bullough thought this so powerful that he concluded (somewhat counter-intuitively perhaps) that it was a major factor discouraging women from giving birth in hospital, where they might escape the extraction of a confession. If a woman went to the hospital to give birth she would automatically attract suspicion that 'she wants to hide from her relatives so that they cannot experience the difficulties she expects to have'.²⁴ Bullough noted that Malawi's first President, Hastings Kamuzu Banda, himself a medical doctor, had 'forcibly' condemned the practice of extracting confessions from birthing women in a speech he had given in the mid-1970s.

The *adoctola*, who had initially hidden from Bullough and his research assistants for fear that they might be prosecuted for practising illegally, were for the most part keen on participating in a training programme that might confer on them a degree of external validation, and so they became 'Traditional Birth Attendants', a not-inconsequential discursive shift.²⁵ Short training courses were devised for them and once trained they were provided with a basic delivery kit and placed (at least theoretically) under the supervision of local medical personnel. Central to their training was the recognition and referral of complications to maternity services, as well as instruction on the management of labour and prevention of infection. Bullough was a pioneer, but he was also reflecting a wider trend. In the 1960s and 1970s a combination of circumstances had led international health agencies, including WHO, to re-evaluate the role of 'traditional' medical

practitioners of all kinds, including midwives. In part this was a pragmatic response to financial, logistic and political barriers, and the comprehensive ‘rolling out’ of biomedical services to developing world populations, and in part it was a response to cultural nationalism.²⁶ In 1977 WHO issued a call for traditional medicine to be incorporated into national health-care plans. This did not appeal to all African governments (the socialist government of Mozambique was one example), but it struck a chord with many, and appeared to offer a partial solution to the challenge of attaining WHO’s own target of ‘Health for all by the Year 2000’, a slogan that had become the subject of much wry commentary in hospital queues in Malawi.²⁷

In 2007, under the Presidency of Bingu wa Mutharika, Malawi’s Ministry of Health announced that Traditional Birth Attendants would no longer be licensed to practice in Malawi and were effectively banned. This decision (which was replicated elsewhere in the region) was reported to have been based on the findings of a UNFPA report that had cast doubt on the efficacy of training TBAs.²⁸ Malawi’s appalling maternal mortality statistics seemed, on the surface at least, to back this up. In fact, the Ministry of Health had already decided, in 2005, not to train any more TBAs, a decision that was not, apparently, communicated to rural women themselves.²⁹ Experts argued that most maternal deaths were caused by delays in women with complications reaching medical facilities, and that a significant proportion of these complications could not be predicted in advance. The conclusion seemed to be that TBAs were at least partially responsible for delays in women reaching medical facilities. When quizzed as to whether banning TBAs would put extra pressure on public health facilities, a spokeswoman for the Ministry of Health asserted (against much available evidence) that:

There is enough capacity in our hospitals to handle maternity cases. The problem is that most women are ill-informed ... often by the same TBAs who are getting paid for services rendered.³⁰

In 2010 the same President, returning from a meeting in the United States on the Millennium Development goals, undid the ban on TBAs, arguing that they had a role to play in diagnosing complications and addressing 'health challenges'.³¹ Malawi's new President, Joyce Banda, has not re-banned them, though she has made it very clear through her Presidential Initiative for Maternal Health and Safe Motherhood, and her establishment of a Chiefs' Committee on this issue, that she believes that 'traditional' practices are partly responsible for the country's high maternal mortality ratio. Laying the foundation stone for a new maternal shelter at Balaka in June this year, Banda said: 'My warning to all TBAs is that if a woman dies in your hands, the law will take its course.'³²

How much effect the formal banning and unbanning of TBAs has had in Malawi is difficult to assess without more research. Recent improvements in the maternal mortality figures are sometimes attributed to the 2010 ban, but this, frankly, seems implausible.³³ There is some anecdotal evidence of prosecutions being brought by human-rights organizations against TBAs at a local level, resulting in fines, but it seems unlikely that this is widespread.³⁴ The local medical community seems divided on the issue, with some obstetricians and gynaecologists bemoaning the unbanning as regressive, while the Nurses and Midwives Council supported it, arguing that banning TBAs would only have the effect of driving them underground. Despite the fact that TBAs have become something of a political football, most practitioners are realistic: until there is a further improvement in maternal health facilities and in access to them, TBAs will continue to practice.

Underlying this headline story is, unsurprisingly, a more complex one of poverty, failing health systems, low staff morale and frustration. And an important component of this story concerns the changing moral economy of blame and the new contexts in which blame gets allocated. Historically, as I have shown, maternal deaths in this region (notably more than infant and child deaths) have tended to be deaths for which some moral cause was sought, some responsibility assigned. I expect that this generalization would hold true for most societies, and it is of course a generalization. Doubtless, in practice, some maternal deaths were passed over without any major social autopsy taking place, particularly in contexts of extreme scarcity. But generally maternal deaths evoke strong feelings, wherever they take place, and strong feelings are not always conducive to a 'rational' apportionment of responsibility. The relatively high maternal death rates of the USA do not appear to have provoked the changes in the funding and allocation of health services required to tackle this problem, presumably because the majority of the victims are poor women from minority communities. Meanwhile, in countries with very low rates of maternal deaths, any such death may be viewed as unacceptable, which is almost certainly unrealistic given some of the biological factors at work. In the UK, the fear of being held legally culpable for deaths of mothers and infants is one factor cited as contributing to a shortage of midwives in some parts of the country, which itself endangers lives.³⁵

Though we can identify the major causes of maternal mortality in a country like Malawi fairly easily (and can identify solutions), the routes to maternal death take us into more complex terrain.³⁶ This is where the UN's 'Road Map' leaves the tarmac. In epidemiological terms, the major 'direct' causes of maternal mortality in Malawi are similar to those worldwide. The majority of maternal deaths take place post-partum and

are due to sepsis, obstructed labour/ruptured uterus and haemorrhage. The results of hospital-based and community-based studies differ somewhat, as might be expected. Hospital-based studies tend to underestimate the incidence of conditions that lead rapidly to death – especially haemorrhage – but are more likely to capture cases related to unsafe abortion.³⁷ ‘Indirect causes’ in epidemiological terms include underlying illnesses and conditions such as HIV/AIDS, malaria and anaemia. There is some evidence to indicate that the rise in Malawi’s maternal mortality ratio in the 1990s was associated with the HIV/AIDS epidemic, both because of the effects of the illness on pregnant women and because of the pressure the epidemic placed on already-stretched medical facilities.³⁸ Beyond the ‘direct’ and ‘indirect’ causes, the maternal mortality literature (and particularly that part of the literature informed by feminist thinking) recognizes the importance of a range of underlying social factors (including the very general one of women’s ‘socio-economic status’) as well as institutional ones. Unmet needs for contraception give rise to unwanted pregnancies. Since any pregnancy poses a risk, this is, in itself, a factor, and when combined with use of unsafe abortion, can be a major contributor to maternal mortality. ‘Delay’ is one of the most commonly used words in this literature: delay in the decision to seek skilled care; delay in arrival at a medical facility and delay in the provision of adequate care. Since only a proportion of birth complications can be screened for and predicted, if a complication arises then speed is of the essence. But speed is an elusive quality. For rural women in particular, the difficulty of arranging and paying for transport to a medical facility can be a major obstacle, which is why health activists in this field focus some of their work on the provision of local ambulances and maternity ‘shelters’. Arriving at a medical facility, however, is often not the end but the beginning of the story.

In 2005 Tarek Meguid (obstetrician/gynaecologist) and his colleague Elled Mwenyekonde (clinical officer) produced a report, innocuously entitled a 'Situation Analysis' of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at the Kamuzu Central Hospital and the Bottom Hospital, Lilongwe, in which they both worked.³⁹ An unusually frank document, unconstrained by the conventional vocabularies of international health, it soon went 'viral', along with graphic visual evidence. It described a nightmarish situation of overcrowding, understaffing, drug and supply shortages, and desperately ill women. But, as is hinted at by one chapter title ('The Veterinary Appeal of Gynaecology'), it also described the lack of discipline and lack of sense of responsibility amongst medical staff, and an institutional culture in which 'poor, female and voiceless' patients were frequently treated without care or respect. The very term 'Bottom Hospital' spoke directly to Malawi's colonial legacy. Separated by five kilometres from Kamuzu Central Hospital, it had formerly been the 'native' hospital, while the 'top' hospital (now KCH) served the white population.⁴⁰ Though Malawi's hospitals are no longer racially segregated, they are effectively segregated by ability to pay. The obstetric department of the 'Bottom Hospital' not only served a large local urban population, but was also the referral maternity hospital for the entire Central Region of the country, handling between 12,000 and 14,000 deliveries a year, with only one, or sometimes two, consultant obstetricians on hand. Shockingly, despite the fact that, from the 1990s, Malawi had been one of the countries in Africa to show the lead in its commitment to 'safe motherhood', the conditions at this centrally important referral hospital were still, in 2005, appalling.⁴¹

No doubt the publicity that this and other reports produced was not entirely welcome to the Malawian Ministry of Health, but it did in this case produce some results. A combination of international philanthropy and a local foundation established

by the then 'first lady', the late Ethel Mutharika wa Bingu, resulted in the 'Bottom Hospital' becoming the new Bwaila Hospital in 2009, and the Ethel Mutharika Maternity Wing being established at Kamuzu Central Hospital. But the situation at the 'Bottom Hospital' appears to have been far from unique. Because of its unenviable position in the maternal mortality rankings, and with the launch of the UN's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Malawi has in the last ten years been the focus of much international attention and intervention in the area of maternal health. 'MDG 5' aims to reduce global maternal deaths by three quarters (between 1990 and 2015), and though Malawi is unlikely to reach that target, it has made very significant progress since making maternal health a key point of its strategy in 2005. One spin-off of this international attention is a relative wealth of documentation on the circumstances of maternal deaths in the country, particularly those that take place in health facilities.

Maternal deaths may be much more common in Malawian hospitals than they are in the hospitals in the 'north' but this does not mean that they do not evoke strong feelings amongst medical staff. Conventionally they should be followed by a 'maternal death review' in addition to an autopsy to determine the cause or causes of death. The clinical 'audit' has been shown to be an effective learning tool, but clearly the management of such processes, particularly in a context of scarcity, is enormously tricky.⁴² Kongnyuy and van den Broek describe the difficulties of conducting such reviews in Malawian hospitals, and what they refer to as the 'bleak atmosphere of fear of repercussions' that surrounds them.⁴³ In her account of such a review carried out at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Blantyre, Claire Wendland describes vividly how models of causation even amongst medical staff go far beyond those implicit in the audit and subvert the intention of arriving at clear conclusions. Yes, the young woman in this case had

suffered a number of seizures and had almost certainly died of eclampsia even before she had reached the hospital – but was her death the result of the fact that the clinic to which she had first been admitted had no drugs or working equipment, or the fact that the ambulance had taken so long to transfer her to the hospital? Did she have an underlying condition such as malaria or HIV? And then there was the fact that she was a teenager, more vulnerable to eclampsia in the first place. One obstetrician present saw teenage pregnancy as the underlying problem and in turn attributed this to the country's relatively new 'democracy'. Meanwhile the family suspected witchcraft. A set of 'causes' emerged, then, that operated at different levels of analysis and across different time frames. It is not exactly that these are competing narratives, rather that they coexist and intersect at various points. But they are certainly not easily reducible to one entry in the statistical return that would have to go to the Ministry of Health.⁴⁴

As Wendland argues, at one level it would be possible to attribute this young woman's death, and that of others like her, to the country's poverty. But many maternal health activists would disagree with this diagnosis. As one Ugandan obstetrician remarked in a recent conference on this subject, there *are* simple and inexpensive interventions that can save women's lives, and the fact that they are not always made cannot always be attributed simply to a lack of physical resources. This is backed up by good-quality research in Malawi, though it must always be borne in mind that the lack of *human* resources is often acute.⁴⁵ For many health professionals, then, the frequently yawning gap between theory and practice is understandably the cause of immense frustration.⁴⁶ For some this leads to political activism, for others to a further search for moral causation.

As we have seen, TBAs have often been a target for blame at the national political level, and this is sometimes replicated

at the level of clinics and hospitals, where they are accused of causing 'delays' in women seeking treatment. One study on TBA effectiveness in reducing maternal mortality and morbidity found that lack of supplies meant that they were often unable to comply with antiseptic practices, and were also unable to fulfil their role in referral of complex cases owing to lack of transport. While the 'community' tended to hold them in high esteem, health personnel saw their effectiveness as limited owing to 'high levels of illiteracy and old age'.⁴⁷ Aparna Kumar's study in one of the 'Millennium Villages' in Southern Malawi found that *azamba*, as they are known, were valued in part precisely because they could address the 'spiritual' issues entailed in childbearing, including those involving witchcraft. Community nurses in the same study were cynical, arguing that TBAs always found some way of exonerating themselves when things went wrong, particularly by reference to such 'spiritual' issues:

... and if this does not work, always they will pinpoint that oh, this one has been bewitched maybe by other relatives. Or maybe the husband was promiscuous ... The blame is not with the TBA, whereas the blame is with the nurse.⁴⁸

So, in the opinion of the community nurses interviewed by Kumar, *azamba* were able to resort to blaming their clients and families and the social/spiritual context for maternal deaths, while they themselves would be likely to be blamed if things went wrong in the clinic – 'adultery' and 'witchcraft' do not feature on the standard medical list of causes of death. They could be held 'accountable', while *azamba* typically were not. However, numerous studies from Malawi and the region show that medical personnel themselves sometimes resort to blaming the client. Though the nature of the accusations is different, tending to revolve around poverty and perceived

respectability, it is no less morally laden than the *azambas*' diagnosis.

Perhaps the most direct and (for some at least) shocking evidence for this kind of practice comes from the hard-hitting 2010 Human Rights Watch report on South Africa entitled 'Stop Making Excuses', which documents a range of negligent and abusive behaviours in the maternal health sector, directed particularly at refugee and immigrant women.⁴⁹ Doubtless the dynamics of the South African situation are to some degree specific, but neglect and abuse of women at maternal health facilities is not confined to South Africa, and is widely reported in eastern and southern Africa, including Malawi. Though all sorts of reasons deter women from giving birth in clinics (distance and transport costs being obvious ones), the 'rudeness' of medical personnel is also widely cited. Women in Malawi report being 'shouted at' on labour wards, being treated with disdain and being turned away from facilities, particularly if they come 'late'.⁵⁰ In Malawi, as in other countries, women arriving at clinics and hospitals to give birth are required to produce not only a 'ticket' or 'card', demonstrating that they have attended antenatal appointments, but also a set of 'items' consisting of some or all of the following: a plastic sheet, a basin, thread, razor blade, *zitenje* (cloths), towels and candles.⁵¹ The plastic sheet is the minimum requirement for admission. In addition to this, they need to bring either food or money for food to see them through their stay. This is the case in government hospitals where treatment is technically free – at mission-run hospitals they are required to pay a fee. 'Hospitals are now for rich people. Poor people die under a tree!' is a common remark. One study reported women saying that the need to accumulate all these 'items' was one reason why women arrived 'late' at the maternity ward; another reported that the total cost of such a stay for a poor woman was approximately twenty-six days' worth of income and for a woman from the poorest quintile as much as fifty days'.⁵²

Of course the 'delays' are real. It is easy to sympathize with the frustration felt by medical staff when women regularly arrive with serious complications of childbirth, or close to death. If those deaths take place within the facility, they will be attributed to that facility, and the family and community might well blame them. But turning away women because they have arrived 'late' or are too poor to have accumulated their 'items' is also an indication of the socio-economic gap that has emerged between health care workers and the majority of their patients, and is one oft-stated reason why some women prefer to be attended to by a TBA.⁵³ Interestingly, TBAs themselves do not appear to be immune from this tendency. Kumar's study found that, according to women in her study village, *azamba* who had attended training courses came back with improved hygiene practices, but were also sometimes 'rude and arrogant'.⁵⁴

Numerous studies have found that sub-optimal care makes an important contribution to the overall maternal mortality rate in Malawi. Some conditions (for example eclampsia) are not easy to treat in their later stages, but others are, assuming the availability of basic resources (which, of course, cannot always be assumed).⁵⁵ Blaming pregnant women themselves for arriving late at maternity facilities, as the Human Rights Watch for South Africa report says, is 'no excuse'.

Maternal deaths in this region of Africa (as elsewhere) have always evoked strong feelings. The death of a fertile life-giving woman is particularly poignant in a society in which fertility and reproduction have been the central concerns of social, political and spiritual systems. Precisely *because* maternal deaths mattered and matter, they demand more than sympathy and sorrow. Historically they have been followed by social autopsies and sanctions and these have often appeared, to outsiders at least, as harsh. 'Causes' have been found in the

sexual misconduct of both men and women (but more often women), in the neglect of vital spiritual matters (particularly through the mismanagement or neglect of death rituals) or in wider political mismanagement. Ideologies of fertility played a large role in pre-colonial political systems in this part of Africa and much effort went into securing reproduction. When this failed on a large scale, as it did in some areas as a result of the slave trade and later as a consequence of colonial capitalism, political legitimacy was often called into question. Since the comparative and historical literature seems to show quite conclusively that, across the world, maternal mortality rates fall when moral outrage gets translated into political will and medical intervention, then it seems to follow that this region, with its history of political interest in this matter, is well placed to address this issue. It is probably too soon to know whether the very recent improvements in Malawi's maternal mortality figures are 'real' and permanent, but hopefully they are, and if they are, they will (at least in some part) be attributable to the activism of women like Joyce Banda and her international allies in women's health.

As I have shown in this chapter, what the health literature so often refers to as the 'road' to maternal health is certainly not all tarmac, and once you leave the tarmac things get more complicated (as they always do). The history of political responsibility for this issue in the region is not a continuous one – Joyce Banda is in some sense the inheritor of a political tradition that placed reproduction at its heart, but she has also inherited a colonial history that divided *azamba* from Western-trained midwives, and 'respectable' Christian mothers from their 'uncivilized' sisters. Added to that is a post-colonial history that has seen the increased poverty and marginalization of some sections of the Malawian population, the HIV/AIDS epidemic, structural adjustment and a crisis in health care delivery. Women giving birth outside medical facilities (and

even within them) might still be accused of sexual misdemeanours in the case of complications, or an explanation might be found in 'witchcraft'. At a national level TBAs are accused of, quite literally, holding back progress in maternal health by keeping pregnant women within their orbit and delaying their access to maternity services. Nurses and midwives, working in sometimes chronically understaffed and under-resourced facilities, where women all too often come to die, must participate in clinical audits with their own allocations of responsibility. They in turn sometimes accuse birthing women of irresponsibility (in arriving late, in having become pregnant in the first place) and see their poverty (evidenced in their inability to assemble the necessary set of 'items' before admission) as a moral failing. Since, in every society, maternal deaths matter, they must always be located on one or more 'moral map(s)', and be subject to a moral discourse and analysis.⁵⁶ Indeed, historically it is a moral sense of the unacceptability of maternal deaths that has ultimately given rise to lower mortality rates. Malawi is not in any sense exceptional in this regard, but when access to life-saving practices remains patchy, unpredictable and effectively rationed, blame has a tendency to trump responsibility.

ENDNOTES: CHAPTER VIII

1. H. Englund, *Prisoners of Freedom: Human Rights and the African Poor* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006).
2. Joyce Banda interviewed in Trevor Ballantyne and Rahwa Maharena, 'Malawi: Engaging Local Leaders to Save the Lives of Mothers', *allafrica.com*, 30 September 2011 <<http://allafrica.com/stories/201109301347.html>> [accessed 28 January 2013].
3. On the measurement of maternal mortality and the uses of the 'sisterhood' method see W. J. Graham, 'Now or Never: The Case for Measuring Maternal Mortality', *Lancet*, 359 (2002), 701–04; W. J. Graham, W. Brass, R. W. Snow, 'Estimating Maternal Mortality: The Sisterhood Method', *Studies in Family Planning*, 20, 3 (1989), 125–35; Wendy Graham and Julia Hussein, 'Measuring and Estimating Maternal Mortality in the Era of HIV/AIDS', unpublished report from Workshop on HIV/AIDS and Adult Mortality in Developing Countries, United Nations Secretariat, New York, September 2003 <https://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/adultmort/GRAHAM_Paper8.pdf> [accessed 28 January 2013].
4. For a thorough review and analysis of the Malawian statistics (to 2002) see Eveline Geubbels, 'Epidemiology of Maternal Mortality in Malawi', *Malawi Medical Journal*, 18, 4 (2006), 208–28.
5. WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA and the World Bank, *Trends in Maternal Mortality, 1990–2010: WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA and The World Bank Estimates* (Geneva: WHO, 2012).
6. Graham and Hussein, 'Measuring and Estimating'. The role of HIV/AIDS in the epidemiology of maternal mortality in South Africa (where maternal mortality ratios rose in the 2000s) is discussed in Michel Garenne, Robert McCaa and Kourtoom

- Nacro, 'Maternal Mortality in South Africa in 2001: From Demographic Census to Epidemiological Investigation', *Population Health Metrics*, 6, 4 (2008) <<http://www.pophealthmetrics.com/content/6/1/4>> [accessed 28 January 2013]; Debbie Bradshaw and Rob Dorrington, 'Maternal Mortality Ratio – Trends in the Vital Registration Data', *South African Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology*, 18, 2 (2012), 38–42.
7. Oona Campbell and Wendy Graham, 'Strategies for Reducing Maternal Mortality: Getting On With What Works', *Lancet*, 368 (2006), 1284–99.
 8. Irvine Loudon, 'Maternal Mortality in the Past and its Relevance to Developing Countries Today', *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 72 (2000) (sup.), 241S–46S; Wim Van Lerberghe and Vincent De Brouwere, 'Of Blind Alleys and Things That Have Worked: History's Lessons on Reducing Maternal Mortality', in *Safe Motherhood Strategies: A Review of the Evidence*, ed. by Vincent de Brouwere and Wim van Lerberghe (Antwerp: ITG Press, 2001), pp. 7–33.
 9. Hugh Stannus, 'The Wayao of Nyasaland', in *Harvard African Studies III*, ed. by E. A. Hooton and N. I. Bates (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1922), pp. 246–69. See also H. S. Stannus and J. B. Davey, 'The Initiation Ceremony for Boys Among the Yao of Nyasaland', *Africa*, 43 (1913), 119–23 and Ian D. Dicks, *An African Worldview: The Muslim Amacinga Yawo of Southern Nyasaland* (Zomba, Malawi: Kachere Series, 2012).
 10. *Those Who Play with Fire: Gender, Fertility and Transformation in East and Southern Africa*, ed. by Henrietta L. Moore, Todd Sanders and Bwire Kaare (London: Berg, 2004).
 11. Denise Roth Allen, *Managing Motherhood, Managing Risk: Fertility and Danger in West Central Tanzania* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), p. 206.
 12. Clearly caution is needed when translating the complex ideas associated with *mipashi* (as Audrey Richards noted), but in this context it appears to operate very much like a theory of biology.

13. Lynne Thomas, *Politics of the Womb: Women, Reproduction and the State in Kenya* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003); Carol Summers, 'Intimate Colonialism: The Imperial Production of Reproduction in Uganda, 1907–1925', *Signs*, 16, 4 (1991), 787–807; Hunt, *Colonial Lexicon*; Heather Bell, 'Midwifery Training and Female Circumcision in the Inter-War Anglo-Egyptian Sudan', *Journal of African History*, 39 (1998), 293–312; Roth Allen, *Managing Motherhood*, Chapter 2; Jane Turritin, 'Colonial Midwives and Modernizing Childbirth in French West Africa', in *Women in African Colonial Histories*, ed. by Jean Allman, Susan Geiger and Nakanyike Musisi (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002), 71–94.
14. Loudon, 'Maternal Mortality', 243S.
15. Loudon cites the case of Rochdale in north-west England where, through the energies of one medical officer of health, maternal mortality rates decreased in the early 1930s from 900 per 100,000 to 170, without there being any improvement in social conditions.
16. Van Lerberghe and De Brouwere, 'Of Blind Alleys'.
17. Nancy Rose Hunt, *A Colonial Lexicon of Birth Ritual, Medicalization and Mobility in the Congo* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).
18. Roth Allen, *Managing Motherhood*, p. 31.
19. Colin Bullough, 'Traditional Birth Attendants in Malawi: The Development of a Training Programme' (unpublished doctoral thesis in Medicine, University of Glasgow, 1979).
20. *The Social Basis of Health and Healing in Africa*, ed. by Steven Feierman and John Janzen (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992); Megan Vaughan, *Curing Their Ills: Colonial Power and African Illness* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991).
21. Denise Roth Allen notes this in her study of maternal health in Tanzania: Roth Allen, *Managing Motherhood*.
22. Bullough, 'Traditional Birth Attendants', p.56.

23. Bullough, 'Traditional Birth Attendants'.
24. Bullough, 'Traditional Birth Attendants', p 59.
25. In fact, as Bullough notes, the law in Malawi at the time stated that anyone could practise a system of African therapeutics 'provided he or she is recognized in Malawi to be trained in such practice', so provided the women had the recognition of their communities they were not liable to be prosecuted. Bullough also concluded from this that there was no need to issue the trained midwives with any kind of legal licence, though he did issue them with a letter of attendance and initiated a register of trained midwives. Bullough, 'Traditional Birth Attendants', p. 142.
26. *The Professionalisation of African Medicine*, ed. by Murray Last and G. L. Chavunduka (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986); Gloria Waite, 'Traditional Medicine and the Quest for National Identity in Zimbabwe', *Zambezia*, 27 (2000), 235–68.
27. Personal observations.
28. The report cited in most accounts is UNFPA, *Support to Traditional Birth Attendants* (UN: Office of Oversight and Evaluation, 1995) but this was produced in 1995. It's not clear why it took over a decade for its findings to influence policy.
29. Ministry of Health, 'Road Map for Accelerating the Reduction of Maternal and Neonatal Mortality and Morbidity in Malawi' (Lilongwe: Republic of Malawi, 2005); Ministry of Health, 'Assessment of Future Roles of TBAs in Maternal and Neonatal Health in Malawi' (Lilongwe: Republic of Malawi, 2006); Aparna Kumar, 'The Examination of Traditional Birth Attendant Practices and their Role in Maternal Health Services in Mwandama Village Cluster' (unpublished masters dissertation in Public Health, College of Medicine, University of Malawi, December 2007).
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- www.irinnews.org/printre#3991CB> [accessed 28 January 2013]. In 2004 it was estimated that sixty-four per cent of established nursing and midwifery positions in Malawi were vacant.
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 36. For the consensus on the 'package' of interventions required see Campbell and Graham, 'Strategies for Reducing Maternal Mortality'.

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41. A Malawian friend living in Lilongwe described those conditions in terms of 'femicide'. When I balked a little at this designation, she went on to describe the many occasions when she had taken very sick women there, only to find that there were either no nurses (and certainly no doctors) on duty, or that they had no gloves/scissors/blood.
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44. Claire Wendland, 'Ambiguous Presences: Therapeutic Enclaves in Expert Narratives of Maternal Health', paper to the American Anthropological Association meeting, 20 November 2010. My thanks to Professor Wendland for allowing me to quote from this paper and for conversations on this subject. On competing narratives of maternal health see also Chapman, *Family Secrets*

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CHAPTER IX

Big Houses for the Dead: Burying Presidents Banda and Bingu wa Mutharika of Malawi

Megan Vaughan

When the President of Malawi, Bingu wa Mutharika, died in April 2012, his body was buried in a large white mausoleum, built in his home village in the south of the country. In addition to the dignitaries and diplomats and heads of neighbouring states, ordinary people gathered to witness the event, amongst them a middle-aged woman, Enelesi Kanichi, who was interviewed by a Zimbabwean journalist. She had come, she said, because she was curious about the ‘big house’: ‘I wanted to come and see this white building where the President will be laid to rest. This is something new in our culture that a house can be built for a dead person.’¹

Houses for the dead do indeed appear to be an innovation in this part of Africa where historically it has been the practice to bury the dead in unmarked pieces of land, liminal areas outside the village.² The dead body itself, far from being an object of veneration, was a source of fear and presumed contamination. Indeed, rather than building houses *for* the dead, traditionally it was the practice to destroy the houses *of* the dead. Mourning was in part a period of waiting – waiting for the body to completely decompose and fully release its spirit. Over the years burying one’s dead in graves with headstones within demarcated cemeteries has become more common in this region, particularly in the long-standing urban

communities of Zambia, but cemeteries are not places in which most people linger for long. Big white houses for the dead mirror the big white presidential palaces built for living leaders, but though the public are excluded from the latter, they are welcomed into the former, encouraged to enter, view and reflect.

Central Africa has not been without elaborate burial rites for political leaders, especially in polities with centralizing and imperialistic ambitions. As we have seen in Chapter II, the elaborate burial rites of the Paramount Chief of the Bemba in Zambia end in the burial ground of Mwalule, where the bones of generations of chiefs are preserved with other sacred 'relics'. But there are some significant differences between these practices and the preservation of the body within a mausoleum. Though observers often refer to the Chitimukulu's body as having been 'embalmed', in fact the dangerous work of the Bemba mortuary experts was to achieve the opposite of embalming. The object of their work was to speed up the process of decomposition, to desiccate the body so that it resembled a 'seed'. Only when the flesh had gone could ordinary life be resumed. By contrast, the modern process of embalming (increasingly popular amongst middle-class communities in Africa and not just for presidents) aims, through the injection of chemicals, to preserve the appearance of a plump living body and to enable funerals to be postponed to allow for members of far-flung diasporas to return home.³ President Bingu's body, embalmed and lying in a gold casket, travelled around the country to be viewed by ordinary citizens before being buried beneath the 'big white house' in Thyolo district.

In her book on the reburial of the bodies of politicians in the post-socialist societies of Eastern Europe, Katherine Vedery discusses the political work performed by dead bodies. The symbolic effectiveness of the body, she writes, lies precisely in its multivocality, its capacity to express more than one thing

(while frequently purporting to have just one significance). The dead body of the politician is a site of symbolic capital and 'political profit' and it derives at least some of this power from the fact that it is in a sense 'sacred'. The corpse evokes fear and awe, it disturbs and engages our emotions.⁴ Florence Bernault, amongst others, has discussed the political and sacred symbolism of the body in West Equatorial Africa in the context of colonialism.⁵ We have seen that, in the case of the nineteenth-century Bemba polity, the sacred symbolism of the Paramount Chief's body (and to a lesser extent subordinate chiefs) spoke directly to the central concerns of the polity. There is nothing new, and certainly nothing specifically 'African' about the fact that the dead bodies of leaders have 'political lives' – the questions to be asked revolve around what kinds of political lives they have in the context of the 'postcolony'.⁶ In this chapter I explore these questions in relation to the death, burial and memorialization of two Malawian heads of state: the country's first President, Hastings Kamuzu Banda, and its third President, Bingu wa Mutharika.

Long Live Kamuzu!

No one knows for certain how old Hastings (Kamuzu) Banda was when he died in 1997, but we know that he was very old, certainly in his nineties and possibly over one hundred. Longevity in itself produces its own dynamics. In the 1980s, when I lived in Malawi, rumours of the President's impending or actual death often circulated. He was, after all, already of an advanced age. Once, when he had been flown to South Africa for medical treatment (a fairly frequent occurrence) the joke went like this: Do you think he is going to die? No. He hasn't done it before, so why now? Over the years of his autocratic presidency it did begin to seem that he might be immortal.

Being flown to South Africa alive and back in a casket has become a bit of trope in the history of Malawian presidential deaths, as we shall see. Hastings Banda did eventually die in the Garden City Clinic in Johannesburg, but only after he had ceased to be a serving president. But he had been Malawi's first head of state, and his presidency had been a long one, ending in a 'transition' to democratic rule. His death, then, was unsurprisingly the occasion for reflection on the state of the nation and its history, and the emotions it evoked were suitably ambivalent. Banda's body had a life beyond its death, however. Its 'reburial' in an ostentatious mausoleum in 2006 was part of an explicit programme by Mutharika wa Bingu to restore Banda's reputation and that of authoritarian rule after an interlude of what some saw as the chaos of democratic freedom.

Hastings Banda (self-named Ngwazi Dr H. Kamuzu Banda) died in a South African hospital on 25 November 1997. The story of his life and political career is well known.⁷ Born in the central part of what was then Nyasaland around 1898, the young Banda was a Church of Scotland convert. In 1915–1916 he took the route of many of his compatriots and walked south, first to Southern Rhodesia and then to South Africa to find employment in the mines. In South Africa he met a missionary of the African Methodist Episcopal Church who offered to help fund his education in the United States. Banda left for the USA where he was educated, first at an African-American college in Wilberforce, Ohio, and subsequently taking a medical degree in Tennessee, and later a second medical degree at Edinburgh University. The British colonial authorities were determined not to allow the country's only medical graduate to return home and practice, so Banda remained in Britain, practising as a GP. In 1946, as the nationalist movement got underway in Nyasaland, he became peripherally involved, eventually representing the Nyasaland African Congress at the

Pan-Africanist Movement's Congress in Manchester in 1946. After some time spent in Nkrumah's newly independent Ghana, Banda returned to Nyasaland in 1958 to lead the movement against the Central African Federation and to campaign for full independence. That independence was achieved in 1964. Banda's own peculiar variety of African authoritarianism quickly became evident during the 1964 'Cabinet Crisis', which drove a number of prominent younger politicians into exile. Malawi quickly moved to be one-party state and in 1971 Banda was declared 'President for Life'. Opposition was suppressed, opponents were arrested and imprisoned without trial, or died under suspicious circumstances. Critical to the regime's longevity was the fact that Banda was an ally of the west in the context of the Cold War in southern Africa, and was the only African ruler to have diplomatic relations with apartheid South Africa. But as the Cold War drew to an end, and Malawi's fragile economy began to falter, so the pressure to democratize grew. Eventually Banda agreed to hold a referendum on the one-party state. The result was a vote for multi-party democracy, and in the ensuing election in 1994, Banda was defeated by Bakili Muluzi, who became the country's second president. In 1995 Banda was charged with murder over the deaths of four cabinet ministers ten years earlier, but was acquitted.

Most Malawians greeted the new 'multi-party' era with optimism and enthusiasm, but 'multi-party' did not come without its downsides. In common with many other African countries, democratization came with externally imposed structural adjustment policies. Malawians now had freedom of expression but the country's economy was in free fall and levels of extreme poverty increased. Simultaneously the country experienced a wave of violent crime. Corruption, once the preserve of a small elite around President Banda, had also become 'democratized'. Some Malawians, and not only those

politically aligned to Banda's Malawi Congress Party, began articulating the view that democracy was 'too expensive' and to reflect that perhaps there had been something to be said for Banda's authoritarianism and the certainties of life under his 'four cornerstones': unity, loyalty, obedience and discipline.

When Banda died in 1997 some of these disappointments with democracy had already surfaced, though it was also too soon for all but the most delusional to have completely forgotten the dark sides of the Banda regime.⁸ But Banda's death evoked other feelings too. He was an elder; he had been the country's first president and though he was the 'Father of the Nation', he had no (publicly acknowledged) children of his own. Banda's political uses of the family idiom had never been straightforwardly patriarchal. Instead he had played knowingly and productively on the cultural and political resources of Central and Southern Malawi's matrilineal kinship systems.⁹ He was the maternal uncle (the '*nkhoswe* number one' as he put it) to the country's family of sisters or *mbumba*, and he had employed this matrilineal idiom very effectively in rallying the support of women in the Malawi Congress Party's Women's League. Now this somewhat disgraced elder uncle, who had also been the 'father' of the nation, needed to be buried.

When the former first President of a country dies there are no immediately available guidelines to pluck off the shelf. When Jomo Kenyatta died in 1978 the Kenyan government reportedly sought the advice of Paul C. Miller, the retired American army colonel who had planned John F. Kennedy's funeral.¹⁰ The Malawians in turn looked to Kenyatta's burial as a model. Publicly it was said that the details of Banda's funeral arrangements were decided between Muluzi's cabinet, members of Banda's Malawi Congress Party and his family. There may have been some in government who questioned whether Banda should be granted a state funeral, given his record of human rights violations, but if those voices existed,

they appear to have been silenced. Behind the scenes a key figure was the Malawi Congress Party politician, and Banda's personal physician, Hetherwick Ntaba, who deployed his professional mystique and intimacy with the body of the former President to assert himself at key moments. One of these moments arose even before the former President's body had left South Africa when Ntaba reportedly intervened to replace a coffin chosen by Banda's relatives with a more expensive imported American one. Ntaba was quoted as saying that this bronze casket would 'remain over one hundred years without rusting' and that 'the body has been systematically embalmed and it will be buried in a concrete grave to prevent any damages to the body and casket for historical purposes in the same way that former Kenyan president Mzee Jomo Kenyatta was buried'.¹¹ What, exactly, these 'historical purposes' were, was not made clear. Later, when Banda's body was about to go on public view in the presidential palace in Lilongwe, Ntaba held up proceedings again, ushering everyone out of the room saying that body was not properly prepared.¹²

The former President's body was flown first to Blantyre in the south of the country where it was made available for viewing at the Chichiri Hall (a viewing opened by the President, Bakili Muluzi) and then on to the capital, Lilongwe, where it lay in state in New State House. As one journalist remarked wryly, observers saw it as 'most fitting that Banda should at least lie in state in the K700 million state house he built for himself' since Banda had used the house only once before being voted out of office.¹³ Tellingly, and controversially, it was not flown to the northern region, home to many of Banda's opponents. The two major newspapers, the *Daily Times* and *The Nation*, followed the story in detail and with photographic supplements. Two interrelated themes recurred: the depth of emotions provoked by Banda's death and the question of his legacy for the nation. *The Nation*, with its minute-by-minute

stately account of the arrival of the body in Lilongwe (headed 'Last Flight') took pride in the ability of the Malawian authorities to choreograph an event with 'the precision of clockwork' even amidst the 'hysterical' emotions evoked by the sight of the coffin:

11.25. Soldiers in black trousers and red tunics go on board and after some heaving manage to place the casket, said by Air Malawi to weigh 300kg, in a position to roll down the conveyor ... the weeping and wailing reaches a new high as some women go into hysterics. Some men also openly break into sobs and cries.¹⁴

Weeping and 'hysterical' women featured prominently in the newspaper coverage. Women at the body viewing in Blantyre reportedly collapsed at the sight of Banda lying in his casket, fly whisk in one hand, homburg hat in the other. Malawi was, wrote *The Nation* journalists, 'A Nation in Tears'. The 'dancing' women whose support Banda had so effectively rallied when in power now performed the weeping and wailing customarily expected of them at the funeral of an elder. That this was a performance does not, however, imply that the emotions expressed were not real.¹⁵ Many were genuinely moved, even confused, by the passing of this extraordinary figure. One 'leading loyalist' member of Banda's Malawi Congress Party had heard the news of Banda's death and, disbelieving, she had made her way to view his body in Blantyre. Collapsing at the sight of the body, she blamed the government, saying that 'Kamuzu was not going to die this time had it not been for the torture he has endured under the new government'.¹⁶ Presumably the 'torture' Mai Dinala referred to was the fact that in 1995 Banda had been accused of conspiracy to murder (though he did not attend the trial and was later acquitted) and his financial affairs were, at the time of his death, still under investigation by Muluzi's government.

Published alongside the reports of the raw emotion of the weeping nation were reflective editorials on how Malawi as a nation would live with and understand Banda's legacy. These often started with calls for 'unity'. The downside of democracy, some felt, was heightened political competition, and the dangers of ethnicization. Banda's claim to have united the 'warring tribes' of Malawi was in fact a self-serving myth, but it was one that appears to have had a long life. And it was of course true that though some Malawians had experienced the terror of Banda's secret police and prison camps, the country had not (unlike its neighbour Mozambique) suffered a civil war. 'Peace' was the key word. The MCP-loyalist *Daily Times* editorial expressed it like this:

But most of all, today's accolade will be for the peace that reigned during his thirty-year rule while all around us war held sway. And peace is not something we should have taken for granted considering the times we lived in. Truly, God did not send us an angel. But the peace and tranquillity that we had for thirty years under his leadership could not have been without God's covenant.¹⁷

The tributes in *The Nation* reflected more accurately a legacy that was ambiguous at best. As *The Nation* reported, many Malawians were frankly surprised by the tribute that had been paid to Banda by Nelson Mandela. Banda's legacy was 'controversial', wrote the editor. His rule was associated with 'inexplicable cruelty' and with 'unveiled threats that anyone who dared to disagree with him would become crocodile dinner'. His 'exaggerated' sense of discipline empowered his 'cronies' to put his code into practice with 'hideous thoroughness', with the result that 'many unsuspecting Malawians fell victim or died for reasons so trivial that no sane individual could understand'.¹⁸

Amongst Banda's many former adversaries asked to express a view on his death was Rose Chibambo, veteran of the anti-colonial struggle and the first woman to serve in Banda's cabinet at independence. Banda, Chibambo said, was 'even more cruel than the colonialists'. Far from uniting the country, as he claimed, he employed 'divide and rule' tactics and 'sowed seeds of suspicion among Malawians so they did not trust each other'.¹⁹ Chibambo was unusually frank, as *The Nation* noted with the rhetorical question 'Why does she not shed a tear for the fallen man?', but then went on to answer its own question with the following observation: 'Perhaps it is because her mother was jailed for visiting her in exile. Her husband died in prison and her daughter was locked up on suspicion that they were corresponding with her in exile'.²⁰ Banda's legacy was, *The Nation* concluded, decidedly mixed, but the newspaper nevertheless conveyed the impression that unity in grief was the appropriate response to the death of the 'Father and Founder'.²¹

The funeral took place on Wednesday, 3 December. A few days prior to this the 'funeral arrangements committee' had announced that his body would be buried on a piece of land, close to a war memorial, on Capital Hill at the heart of the new capital city of Lilongwe, itself one of the legacies of the Banda regime. The ceremony, attended by a number of heads of neighbouring states, featured a Christian service and 'traditional' dancing from those of Malawi's ethnic groups particularly favoured by Banda, including Nyau masked dancers.²² *The Daily Times* reported this part of the ceremony, in tones reminiscent of much colonial writing, under the heading '*Hamba Kahle, Baba*' ('Go well, father'):

The sound of the rattle and the stomping of warrior feet will be the heartbeat of the day as *gulewamkulu* from the deep seas and *impi* clad in Ngoni military gear complete with *assegai* and *chishango* join other Malawian ethnic groups in a funeral

ceremony for the man who brought them together as one nation. Today the warring tribes that never saw eye-to-eye before this man returned home in 1958 will dig out their rusting weapons and come face-to-face with the modern weaponry of the Malawi Army. Only it will not be for a war. It will be a fusing of the traditions and technology for a harmonious funeral for this leader of theirs, Ngwazi Dr H. Kamuzu Banda.²³

Finally the expensive and durable coffin was lowered into the concrete-lined grave, above which was built a modest canopy and shelter. Banda had finally been buried. Or had he?

In the coming years, as the wrangling over Banda's will and his complex and duplicitous financial affairs dragged on, the occasional school party, MCP loyalist and curious tourist visited the grave, though it can hardly have been called a pilgrimage site. In his first term of office Bakili Muluzi and his government had engaged in a partial creation of a new version of the nation's past.²⁴ The Banda era certainly warranted such a revisiting, dominated as it had become by imprisonments without trial, a powerful secret service and suppression of freedom of speech. In 1994 Muluzi established a commission of inquiry to look into the suspicious deaths in 1983 of four cabinet ministers. Road accidents that took the lives of prominent people were commonly assumed to be assassinations in Malawi, and sometimes they were.²⁵ In a gesture familiar in other post-dictatorship contexts, Banda's name was erased from a number of prominent public buildings and roads. But in June 2001, President Muluzi, now in his second term of office, announced that his government would allocate forty million kwacha to build a new 'high-tech' tomb for Kamuzu Banda. The country was at the time in the grip of a serious economic crisis and in the months to come the harvest would fail, precipitating a famine. Government corruption was a

contributory factor and Muluzi's popularity was in decline. Banda's tomb, one might have thought, was hardly a priority, but it had potential uses to a president under pressure and looking for support in the Central region of the country, Banda's former stronghold.²⁶ 'I don't want a cheap tomb,' Muluzi announced. He wanted instead a new, more appropriately durable monument which would 'reconcile Malawians' because 'we need to forgive each other'.²⁷ In practice other things *did* take priority and Muluzi never saw this plan through. In 2002 Muluzi tried, unsuccessfully, to change the constitution to allow for him to have a third term in office. In 2004 he was succeeded by Bingu wa Mutharika, an economist who had clashed with Banda and had spent most of the Banda era abroad.

The Death and Rebirth of Democracy

Bingu wa Mutharika's many significant achievements in his first term of office were accompanied by what some Malawian veterans of the Banda era recognized as signs of creeping authoritarianism, an authoritarianism that became dominant in his second term. While many deplored this turn, there is no doubt that there was also a certain populist appeal to this style of leadership. Democracy had lost its appeal for many during Muluzi's second term. In the later 1990s and early 2000s Malawi was in the grip of a serious economic crisis and an escalating HIV/AIDS epidemic. Already one of the poorest countries in Africa, it lurched into a serious food crisis in the early 2000s. Corruption had become more widespread ('democratized' as some would have it), and a general disillusionment with democracy set in, along with a degree of nostalgia for the certainties of the Banda era when (so it was alleged), food supply had been reliable, if not always plentiful,

and violent crime rare. The time was ripe, then, for a Banda rehabilitation. Banda's name was restored on a number of structures and Bingu wa Mutharika picked up the mausoleum project where Muluzi had left it.

In May 2005 it was announced that Banda's body would be moved to a new and more substantial (and more expensive) tomb in the newly declared 'Heroes' Acre' near the centre of government in Lilongwe. Addressing any sceptics who might be out there, the Minister of Culture explained that 'culturally, whether there is hunger or not, the dead are always given due respect'.²⁸ Giving the dead 'due respect' was undoubtedly a preoccupation of many Malawians at this time as they struggled with the consequences of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, with all its human and financial costs, including the cost of funerals. Banda's new tomb was to cost the nation an estimated \$600,000, and it was no ordinary structure. The two-storey building rests on four granite pillars representing the 'four cornerstones' that Banda so often reminded the Malawi population were the foundation of their nation: 'unity, loyalty, obedience and discipline'. On the lower floor of the structure, inaccessible to the public, is the former President's tomb. On the upper floor is a viewable replica of the tomb, along with a library and public space. Banda's family reportedly vetoed the original design that allowed access to the actual coffin, together with retractable lid. The mausoleum is topped with a dome and crucifix. When in power Banda had cultivated the notion that he was the country's 'messiah'. Reuben Chirambo argues that the crucifix on the mausoleum not only affirms that Banda was a Christian, but 'situates him in a dominant discourse of his leadership as ordained or appointed by a Christian deity'.²⁹

The opening ceremony took place in May 2006, attended by a crowd of an estimated ten thousand people. President Bingu wa Mutharika announced that though there had been previous attempts to 'obliterate the name of Kamuzu Banda

from the minds of Malawians and history', this name would now be restored. Bingu's political appropriation of the Banda legacy could hardly have been more explicit as when he declared that on Banda's death the women of Malawi had lost their '*Nkhoswe*', but that now he would be their '*Nkhoswe*' and they would be known as '*Amayi a Bingu*' (Bingu's women).³⁰

In the coming years Bingu wa Mutharika's style of leadership would come to resemble Banda's in an uncanny fashion. As some commentators remarked, only Banda's trademark flywhisk was missing. By the late 2000s Malawi was once more in the grip of a prolonged economic and political crisis, and opposition to Bingu's government was mounting. In May 2007, Ethel Mutharika, the President's wife for thirty-seven years, died after a long, but not publicly acknowledged, illness. A Zimbabwean by birth, Ethel Mutharika was sometimes held



Figure 3: The mausoleum of President Hastings Kamuzu Banda in 'Heroes' Acre', Lilongwe, Malawi

responsible for Bingu's increasingly close relationship with Robert Mugabe, and (like all 'first ladies') was accused of indulging in extravagant shopping expeditions. But despite this she was generally a popular figure, whose charitable works through her Ethel Mutharika Foundation (including the building of a new maternity wing at Kamuzu Central Hospital, see Chapter VIII) were highly valued and respected. This was the first time that Malawi had lost a 'first lady' and the nation went into (what seemed to me, at least) a period of genuine mourning. This is not to say that political capital was not also derived from her death. An official period of mourning was announced and her body was flown to each region of the country for public viewing before she was buried in her husband's home in Thyolo district. The first lady's death, coming in the midst of a national crisis, elicited, once again, calls for 'national unity', as well as personal sympathy for the President's loss, and sympathetic observers would put his more erratic and autocratic behaviour down to the destabilization caused by grief. Meanwhile Ethel Mutharika's memory was being kept alive in what appeared to be a new 'tradition'. In December 2010 (a few months before remarrying), Bingu opened a massive mausoleum to his late wife at his home in Thyolo district where she was buried. The gleaming, thirty-metre-high white-domed structure was quickly dubbed the 'Taj Mahal', though it was allegedly modelled on the US Congress. It is certainly a great deal bigger and more elaborate than Banda's mausoleum.

On Thursday, 5 April 2012, news began coming out of Malawi to the effect that the President had died of a cardiac arrest that morning. There were some sporadic scenes of jubilation on the streets of Lilongwe, but also a sense of nervous anticipation. The reports of the President's death were quickly followed by denials. Government spokesmen, including Dr Hetherwick Ntaba (who had, in 1997, overseen Banda's funeral arrangements),

maintained that he was 'unwell', or that he had suffered a heart attack and had been flown to a South African hospital after initial treatment at Lilongwe's Kamuzu Central Hospital. Conspiracy theories are not uncommon around presidential deaths, in Malawi as elsewhere, but you did not need to be a conspiracy theorist to believe that the President was, in fact, dead, and that flying his body to South Africa was a time-buying tactic on the part of members of his cabinet. Bingu's unexpected death threatened to create a constitutional crisis and there were rumours that a coup was being planned from within his 'kitchen cabinet'. According to Malawi's constitution, at the death of a president, the Vice President succeeds. But the Vice President was Joyce Banda, who had fallen out with Bingu in 2010 and had been expelled from his DPP party. Bingu had been known to be grooming his brother, Peter Mutharika, as his successor. For forty-eight hours, while Bingu was officially still 'alive', it seemed that a plan was being hatched to make this happen, but eventually the constitutionalists prevailed. On Saturday, 7 April Bingu's death was officially announced, though whether that death had 'formally' taken place on 5 or 6 April was not made clear. Joyce Banda played it cool and respectful, dampening the continued speculation that a coup was in the offing. She was quoted by the BBC as saying that 'the constitution is prevailing right now ... The paramount issue to be discussed at cabinet meetings is the funeral of the father of the nation'. At 5.20 p.m. on Saturday, 7 April, Banda was sworn in as President. She called for unity and for the Malawian people to 'focus on mourning our father'.

This did not of course prevent speculation as to the cause of death, despite the fact that Bingu had died at the considerable age of seventy-eight years. One member of the crowd that gathered outside the parliament building where Banda was being sworn in, summed it up like this:

We thought he was at the centre of the problems that we are encountering as a country ... We take this as a divine intervention because there was a call for him to resign. It's actually a divine resignation.³¹

This 'divine resignation' had, it was said by some, been predicted by T. B. Joshua, the Nigerian preacher and self-styled 'prophet' who had been visited in recent months by Joyce Banda, and whose Emmanuel TV station was watched by many in Malawi. On 5 February, during a service in his church in Lagos, T. B. Joshua had apparently predicted that an 'old' African president would die 'in two months' time'. On the 2 April he reiterated the 'prophecy' and said that the death would happen 'very soon'. This news did not escape President Bingu who, at a meeting of religious leaders scoffed at the idea and said, 'I am not going to die because someone wants me to die.'³² On 9 April, during a live broadcast from his church, T. B. Joshua claimed that Bingu had been aware that the prediction related to him, and had written to the preacher. A letter was produced and waved to the camera, but its contents were not revealed. Keen to distance themselves from T. B. Joshua's claims, it was reported that Malawian officials changed the date of Bingu's death from the 5 to the 6 April.

The late President's body was flown back to Malawi in a South African Defence Force aircraft on 14 April, and on the tarmac was formally handed over to representatives of the Malawi Defence Force. This was a reminder, amidst all the speculation of divine intervention, that Bingu had been a highly regarded African statesman at one time, and was a former President of the African Union. Following the 'tradition', Bingu's body was put on display, in an open casket, first in the capital city of Lilongwe, then in Mzuzu, in the northern region, and finally in Blantyre in the south. Long queues formed in Lilongwe for the viewing, the sombre mood no doubt

genuine, but also subject to enforcement by soldiers and police. A rumour started that Kamuzu Banda's body was going to be exhumed from its mausoleum (presumably to be replaced by Bingu's), but this turned out to be false.³³

Bingu wa Mutharika's state funeral took place in Thyolo district on 23 April and was attended by an estimated 30,000 mourners. He was buried next to his first wife in the mausoleum that he had built for her, saving the country further expense.³⁴ Malawi was experiencing a crisis of fuel supply (widely attributed to his government's mismanagement), which threatened to disrupt the event. As a gesture of goodwill, the Zambian President, who had had a frosty relationship with Bingu, donated petrol. The funeral, which began with a Catholic mass, was attended by a number of heads of state, including Robert Mugabe. President Joyce Banda led the mourning, delivering a eulogy that some thought was a little 'over the top' given that the man being buried had, not so long before, threatened to try her for treason. Bingu, she said, had taught her not only to dream, but 'to dream in colours'. She went on to give sisterly counsel to Bingu's brother, Peter Mutharika, whose own planned succession to the presidency had been thwarted. She advised him that he should quickly move to take over the role of 'father' of the family and guardian of Bingu's widow, Callista Mutharika. Essentially she seemed to be telling him that now his succession ambitions would have to be scaled down from the nation to the family. She could not be faulted for her dignified behaviour at the funeral, but this did not prevent her from delivering a few carefully crafted swipes at her political enemies. African politicians are rarely credited with a sense of irony. Perhaps they should be more often.

In the aftermath of Bingu's death there was some discussion on Malawian internet sites as to whether the nation was prone to hypocrisy in its approach to the death of leaders. But it

seems to me that Bingu's death, like Banda's, gave rise to the expression of a realistic ambivalence. It was remembered that, in his first term, Bingu had done much to stop the rampant corruption that had developed during his predecessor's period in office. He had restored the country's economic stability and, most importantly, secured the food supply after years of widespread food shortage. Malawi is a very poor country and for the majority of Malawians, household food security is a perennial concern. Bingu's fertilizer subsidy programme had been hailed as a model for other parts of the continent and he was popularly thought to have 'ended hunger'. The fact that things had gone downhill in a bad way in his second term could not completely erase the positive side of his record. You could label Malawian political culture 'hypocritical' or you could call it realistically ambivalent. Certainly, in the face of the death of an elder statesman, there is a tendency on the part of 'ordinary' people to err on the side of generosity (and Christian forgiveness) rather than engage in the mechanistic exercises of accountability assumed by political models of democracy. But if the Malawian public has laid Bingu to rest, this is not true of all of its politicians.

Soon after Bingu's burial, in May 2012, President Joyce Banda announced the appointment of a commission to inquire into the circumstances leading to his death. Speaking during a budget meeting in parliament, Banda said that she had observed a 'growing desire among Malawians to find out how the President died',³⁵ an assertion that met with widespread scepticism. The commission, she said, would investigate the date of death, the cause of death and the medical attention that had been available to the late President. But, crucially, it would also investigate the role of certain individuals during the 'transition' period. In other words, it would investigate the alleged coup attempt, but under the guise of a wider 'autopsy'. Bingu's family reacted immediately saying that they

had not been consulted and that they saw no need for an inquiry into the former President's death. They called for 'respect' in the face of their loss. They quoted John 8.32 ('Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free') in support of their argument that the truth was already known and of their hope that 'the late President's name will not be dragged into political duplicity that has nothing to do with establishing the "truth"'. They went further, emphasizing that they were a 'Christian clan' and as such 'will not be party to any satanic machinations that seek to use our beloved relation's death to advance personal and political agendas'.³⁶

The accusation of 'satanic machinations' (which in some later reports evolved into 'satanic mechanizations') had both an immediate reference and a more diffuse set of associations. The wider set of associations was to the custom of 'social autopsy' and the allegations of witchcraft that frequently follow deaths in Malawi, but from which more orthodox Christians are obliged to distance themselves. The more immediate reference was to Joyce Banda's much-publicized visits to T. B. Joshua both before and after Bingu's death. Though T. B. Joshua is a Christian, to some his 'predictions' smack of decidedly non-Christian tendencies. In such circumstances President Banda's insistence on a commission of inquiry (which is still sitting as I write) may seem rather dangerous, but she is apparently determined to expose her political enemies and the modern equivalent of the 'social autopsy' is the way she has chosen to do this.

Conclusion

In much recent analysis, contemporary African politics has been described as suffused by the 'death principle' and haunted by the dead. Death practices are seen to speak to the failures

of African states, states where life is 'rationed' and whose populations balance precariously between life and death. War and genocide have given rise to a 'banalization' of violence in some parts of the continent, where the 'normal' processes of mourning are replaced by obsessive memorialization.³⁷ More generally, death and deaths in Africa are viewed as critical sites of debate around ideas of 'belonging' – to a family, an ethnicity, a nation or a diasporic community.³⁸ As a subject of much conspicuous expenditure, contemporary funerals (and the new funeral industry that delivers them) speak to cultures of consumption and to stark economic inequalities that now mark African societies.³⁹

Post-colonial Malawi has not been the site of a civil war, though it played host, for many years, to its Mozambican neighbours escaping from one. Neither has the post-colonial Malawian state ever collapsed into a state of anarchy and violence. This is not to say that Malawians have not been subject to various forms of violence. Countless Malawian citizens were imprisoned without trial under Kamuzu Banda's dictatorship, and some lost their lives. Banda was an expert practitioner of the art of psychological terrorism. If Malawians under his regime were not experiencing everyday violence at the hands of the state, many certainly lived in constant fear of it. In particular, despite his being the self-proclaimed unifier of the nation, Banda's rule entrenched regional inequalities and regional identities. Though the country has always held together, the spectre of regionalism and the possibility (however remote this might seem to observers) of inter-regional violence have haunted Malawian politics.

For some, the 'freedoms' of democracy under Bakili Muluzi who succeeded Banda appeared to come with more, rather than less, violence (violent crime in particular), more death (principally from HIV/AIDS) and less food. Life, especially for the poor, was ever more precarious. During Bingu wa

Mutharika's first term it seemed for a while as if Malawians could have democracy *and* order, food *and* freedom of speech. But by his second term this appeared to be an illusion. Order became authoritarianism, and Bingu's efforts to secure the succession of the presidency for his brother reminded Malawians of the downside of political stability – you could get stuck with one leader, or another version of him, for ever. It is not difficult to see why his death, coming as it did in the midst of an extremely serious political and economic crisis, was interpreted by some as a 'divine resignation'.

The funerals of Banda and Bingu, and the processes of memorialization that accompanied their deaths do not appear to call for any very elaborate analysis, and neither do they reveal a political culture enthralled to death. However, as might be expected, they do speak to political concerns. Banda's body, in particular, has had a 'political life' beyond the grave. It seems unlikely that Bingu's will live on for as long. That their bodies (and not just their memories) will be available for political reappropriation in the future appears to have been ensured through the use of new technology and the new 'tradition' of the mausoleum – though, of course, even the most expensive coffin can be destroyed and a mausoleum can be reduced to a ruin. The public mourning for Hastings Banda, the first President of Malawi, was unsurprisingly the occasion for a reflection on the state of the nation and its history, and that reflection revealed both national pride and ambivalence about his political legacy. This particular body was, indeed, 'multivocal'.⁴⁰ Bingu's 'resurrection' of the Banda legacy and his reburial of Banda's body may have been designed to deliver a clear message, but since Banda's body evoked ambivalence, Bingu's reappropriation of it just served to reinforce that.

Banda's death was long anticipated, but Bingu wa Mutharika's death came as a surprise to all but T. B. Joshua. The sudden death of a serving President must always deliver a political

shock and give rise to conspiracy theories. Bingu's death was quite evidently the occasion for direct political manoeuvring in the hiatus created between the cardiac arrest and the public announcement of his death. 'Treatment in South Africa', following a failed resuscitation in a Malawian hospital with no power, gave space for Bingu's close allies to scheme to subvert the constitutional succession of the Vice President, though this plan did not ultimately succeed.

Viewed historically and contextually the political manoeuvrings and 'spiritual machinations' around Bingu's death do not look so surprising. Malawi is a modern state with a modern constitution, demanding quick action, but it is also a state that contains within it the reinvented vestiges of chiefly systems in which succession is frequently far from straightforward. A hiatus between the death of a chief and the announcement of his (more rarely, her) death is not unusual. The announcement of a successor might be expected to take months, sometimes years. Death itself is a process that takes time – the period between the death of the body and the release of the spirit being particularly crucial. That Bingu's death might be the subject of some spiritual speculation mixed in with the political manipulation comes as no surprise. But neither should this detract from the more innovative elements of this presidential death: that spiritual forces are being beamed on television from Nigeria, that the president himself is buried in a 'big white house' and last but not least that the successor to the highest office in the country is a woman, a human rights activist and a feminist.

ENDNOTES: CHAPTER IX

1. 'Mugabe, Tsvangirai Attend Mutharika Burial', *New Zimbabwe*, 24 April 2012 <<http://www.newzimbabwe.com/news-7794-Mugabe,%20Tsvangirai%20at%20Mutharika%20burial/news.aspx>> [accessed 18 July 2012].
2. Deborah Kaspin, 'Chewa Visions and Revisions of Power: Transformations of the Nyau Dance in Central Malawi', in *Modernity and its Malcontents: Ritual and Power in Postcolonial Africa*, ed. by Jean and John Comaroff (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1993), 41–42. On the spatial aspects of death and memory see Sandra Greene's illuminating study of the Anlo in Ghana: Sandra Greene, *Sacred Sites and the Colonial Encounter: A History of Meaning and Memory in Ghana* (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002). In some parts of Africa the spatial location of the body is highly significant, as is the custom of 'visiting' graves. This does not appear to be a feature of the Malawi region, though there may be exceptions.
3. Rebekah Lee, 'Death "On the Move": Funerals, Entrepreneurs and the Rural–Urban Nexus in South Africa', *Africa*, 71 (2012), 163–74; *Funerals in Africa: Explorations of a Social Phenomenon*, ed. by Michael Jindra and Joel Noret (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2012).
4. Katherine Vedery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 32.
5. Florence Bernault, 'Body, Power and Sacrifice in Equatorial Africa', *Journal of African History*, 47 (2006), 207–39.
6. Much has been written on the political symbolism of the body in European history. Particularly influential is Ernst

- Kantorowicz's analysis of the mediaeval fiction of the king's 'two bodies' – one natural, the other 'sacred' and invisible: Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957); *From the Royal to the Republican Body: Incorporating the Political in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century France*, ed. by Sarah E. Melzer and Kathryn Norberg (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1998).
7. Philip Short, *Banda* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974); John Lwanda, *Kamuzu Banda of Malawi: A Study in Promise, Power, and Paralysis* (Zomba: Kachere Books, 2009).
 8. Farai Sevenso, 'Bedtime for Banda', *Transition*, 85 (2000), 4–29.
 9. Jan Kees van Donge, 'Kamuzu's Legacy: The Democratisation of Malawi. Or Searching for the Rules of the Game in African Politics', *African Affairs*, 94 (1995), 227–57.
 10. John Muchangi, 'A Look at Past State Funerals', *The Star* (Kenya), 5 October 2011 <<http://www.the-star.co.ke/news/article-46838/look-past-state-funerals-kenya>> [accessed 18 July 2012].
 11. 'Wrangle Over Banda's coffin', *The Nation*, 28 November 1997.
 12. 'Ntaba Delays Body Viewing', *The Nation*, 2 December 1997.
 13. *The Nation*, 2 December 1997, back page.
 14. 'Last Flight', *The Nation*, 2 December 1997, front page.
 15. As we have seen in earlier chapters, expressions of grief were carefully choreographed in many 'traditional' central African societies but, as Godfrey Wilson argued in relation to the Nyakyusa, the grief was real enough (see Chapter II).
 16. *Daily Times*, 28 November 1997.
 17. 'Hambe Kahle, Baba', *Daily Times*, 3 December 1997.
 18. 'The Two Sides of Former President Dr Kamuzu Banda', *The Nation*, 28 November 1997, p. 10.
 19. 'Dr Banda in Rose Chibambo's Eyes', *The Nation*, 2 December 1997, p. 11.

20. Ibid.
21. Van Donge, 'Kamuzu's Legacy'.
22. On the Nyau and its role in Banda's regime see Kaspin, 'Chewa Visions'.
23. 'Hamba Kahle, Baba', *Daily Times*, 3 December 1997.
24. On the remaking of the past in the post-Banda era see J. K. Van Donge, 'The Mwanza Trial as a Search for a Usable Malawian Political Past', *African Affairs*, 97, (1998), 91–118; Van Donge, 'Kamuzu's Legacy'; *Democratization in Malawi: A Stocktaking*, ed. by K. M. Phiri and K. R. Ross (Blantyre, Malawi: CLAIM, 1998); *A Democracy of Chameleons: Politics and Culture in the New Malawi*, ed. by Harri Englund (Blantyre, Malawi: CLAIM/MABUKU, 2002).
25. Van Donge, 'The Mwanza Trial'; Joey Power, 'Remembering Du: An Episode in the Development of Malawian Political Culture', *African Affairs*, 97 (1998), 369–96.
26. The late Reuben Makayiko Chirambo wrote insightfully on the monumentalization of Banda's legacy, and resistances to it: Reuben Makayiko Chirambo, "'A Monument to a Tyrant", or Reconstituted Nationalist Memories of the Father and Founder of the Malawi Nation', *Africa Today*, 56, (2010), 2–21; Reuben Makayiko Chirambo, 'The Sinking Cenotaph: Jack Mapanje's and Steve Chimombo's Contestation of Monumentalised Nationalist Public Memories of Malawi's President Banda', *Social Dynamics*, 36, (2010), 547–64.
27. 'Tomb for Banda's Gold Coffin', *News 24*, 16 June 2001 <<http://www.news24.com/Africa/News/Tomb-for-Bandas-gold-coffin-20010616>> [accessed 20 July 2012].
28. Aubrey Sumbuleta, 'New Tomb for Malawi's Banda', *BBC News*, 13 May 2005 <<http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/afri#3A2137>> [accessed 12 February 2013].
29. Chirambo, 'Monument to a Tyrant', p. 16. Banda is of course not the only former African President to be buried in a

- mausoleum. Kenyatta was buried in one when he died in 1978; Kwame Nkrumah's body was moved to a large and lavish one; Nyerere's body also lies in a mausoleum, though in this case a more modest and domestic-looking structure.
30. Reuben Makayiko Chirambo, 'Democracy as a Limiting Factor for Politicised Cultural Populism in Malawi', *Africa Spectrum*, 2 (2009), 77–94.
 31. Banda Sworn In as Malawi's President with Call for Unity', *AFP*, 7 April 2012 <<http://www.capitalfm.co.ke/news/2012/04/banda-sworn-in-as-malawis-president-with-call-for-unity/>> [accessed 12 February 2013].
 32. 'Prophet TB Joshua Insists President's Death "Very Close"', *Nyasa Times*, 2 April 2012 <<http://www.nyasatimes.com/2012/04/02/prophet-tb-joshua-insists-presidents-death-very-close/>> [accessed 12 February 2013].
 33. I am very grateful for these first-hand observations made by Faith Taylor, who was present at the Lilongwe viewing of the body and who visited the Banda mausoleum on the same day.
 34. Bingu claimed that Ethel Mutharika's mausoleum was built entirely from his own pocket and from donations, though this was widely disputed in Malawi.
 35. Austin Kakande, 'JB to Investigate Bingu's Death: Commission Shall Inquire into Actual Date of Death, Cause of Death, Medical Attention Available to Bingu', *Malawi Voice*, 18 May 2012 <<http://www.malawivoice.com/2012/05/18/jb-to-investigate-bingus-death-commision-shall-inquire-into-actual-date-of-death-cause-of-death-medical-attention-available-to-bingu-17797/>> [accessed 12 February 2013].
 36. 'Late Wa Mutharika's Family Rejects Inquiry into his Death', *Face of Malawi*, 8 June 2012 <<http://www.faceofmalawi.com/2012/06/late-wa-mutharikas-family-rejects-inquiry-into-his-death/>> [accessed 12 February 2013].
 37. Bogumil Jewsiewicki and Bob W. White, 'Introduction', *African Studies Review*, 48 (2005), 1–9; Bob W. White, 'The

- Political Undead: Is It Possible to Mourn for Mobutu's Zaire?', *African Studies Review*, 48 (2005), 65–85; Achille Mbembe, 'Necropolitics', *Public Culture*, 15 (2003), 11–40; Deborah Posel and Pamila Gupta (eds), *African Studies*, 28 (2009), Special Issue on the Life of the Corpse. For reviews of recent literature on death in Africa see Rebekah Lee and Megan Vaughan, 'Death and Dying in the History of Africa Since 1800', introduction to special issue of *Journal of African History*, 49 (2009), 341–59; Rebekah Lee and Megan Vaughan, 'Introduction: Themes in the Study of Death and Loss in Africa', *African Studies*, 71, 2 (2012), 163–73.
38. Peter Geschiere, 'Funerals and Belonging: Different Patterns in South Cameroon', *African Studies Review*, 48 (2005), 45–64; D. Durham and F. Klaitis, 'Funerals and the Public Space of Sentiment in Botswana', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 28 (2002), 777–95; S. Reynolds-Whyte, 'Going Home?: Belonging and Burial in the Era of AIDS', *Africa*, 75 (2005), 154–72.
 39. Jindra and Noret, Funerals in Africa; K. Arhin, 'The Economic Implications of Transformations in Akan Funeral Rites', *Africa*, 64 (2004), 307–22.
 40. Vedery, *Political Lives*.

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In this set of essays Walima T. Kalusa and Megan Vaughan explore themes in the history of death in Zambia and Malawi from the late nineteenth century to the present day. Drawing on extensive archival and oral historical research they examine the impact of Christianity on spiritual beliefs, the racialised politics of death on the colonial Copperbelt, the transformation of burial practices, the histories of suicide and of maternal mortality, and the political life of the corpse.

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